

FrederickNewsPost.com**Fighting the big guys**

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By Bill Pritchard

Thank goodness you have someone like me to bring perspective to this PATH substation issue, especially since I attended a 15-minute meeting Dec. 20 and News-Post business reporter Ed Waters Jr. has only been writing in depth about the issue for four years.

But first, I need to insert a disclaimer here -- which can really hurt if not done right -- about my standing. I love my electricity, and everything that goes with it. I love my high monthly bills. I even love those mystery add-ons to that bill -- like the "franchise tax," the "energy cost adjustment," and especially the "cogeneration PURPA surcharge."

Yes, sir, I appreciate my electricity as much as the next guy and certainly would not look forward to watching our favorite TV shows by candlelight or having to build a small fire in the living room to keep warm since we have electric heat.

And it's only because I love them so much -- those powerful power companies, lobbyists, generously compensated executives, lawyers and assorted PR types -- that I want to see them do the right thing by those local residents who are trying mightily not to get run over by the big guys.

That running over people part would have to include trying to put a ridiculously huge electric substation -- at 42 acres, twice the size of Francis Scott Key Mall or about the size of the Pentagon -- smack in the middle of some of the prettiest rolling hills and some of the nicest housing developments you could find in Frederick County.

The Potomac Appalachian Transmission Highline proposed by Allegheny Power, American Electric Power and PJM Connection, is a 275-mile, 765-kilovolt power line from West Virginia to Maryland and the proposed substation at Kempton/Monrovia, west of Mount Airy, is at the end of the 20-mile segment that crosses Maryland.

Check out the view from just some of the backyards that will face this industrial nightmare -- yards like the Beiters' on South Reyburn Court, the Burdens' on Noah Court or the Jarosinskis' at Cowmans Court South. From a view of farmland, hills and a single power line, they'd be looking at 32 football fields full of concrete, steel and wires and at least six 175-foot towers, taller than the Statue of Liberty.

And all the residents in the 1,300 homes within one mile of the substation would have to live with the threat of transformer explosions or fires; high electromagnetic field levels; potential pollution of groundwater, along with other hazards; the gouging out of hills to create a level site; and reduced property values.

It's hard to say this without shouting or putting it in all capital letters, but that is just the absolutely worst place for a substation.

Thanks to Dick Ishler, president, and Ginny MacColl, vice president, of Citizens Against the Kempton Electric Substation for background information and a tour of the area. They are great examples of ordinary people who refused to be intimidated by the big guys. They are spending countless hours recruiting, fundraising, lobbying and making detailed presentations at meetings.

Since it's not over, they could still use your help. Contact them at nokemptonsubstation@comcast.net or on their website at www.nokemptonsubstation.org.

Maybe it's not our fight. Maybe it's not even close to our neighborhood. But the next time, when the big guys come calling, it could be our fight and you can bet we'd welcome support against overwhelming odds.

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