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County Commissioners get look at substation site

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Four Frederick County commissioners took a first-hand look Thursday at the area that would be affected by a proposed utility substation.

Citizens Against the Kemptown Electric Substation, or CAKES, invited commissioners to see where the proposed structure would be located.

The site, off Bartholows Road and Cowmans Manor Drive near Mount Airy, would be the terminus of a nearly 300-mile, \$1.8 billion power line known as PATH.

The Potomac Appalachian Transmission Highline would begin in West Virginia, cross Virginia and about 20 miles of Maryland.

Commissioners Jan Gardner, David Gray, Kai Hagan and Charles Jenkins met first at the home of Cindy Putnam in West Oaks subdivision, located across from the proposed site.

Later, the commissioners and several CAKES members drove to locations around the area to view the site from different angles.

During the two-hour meeting and tour, some of the commissioners questioned the impact of the proposed substation on the wellhead protected area for the neighborhood. The substation site, owned by Allegheny Energy, is near that protected area.

Phil Thurston, an owner of one of the 1,200 homes in subdivisions around the site, said the substation would be the size of 32 football fields. CAKES members said they are not only against the visual impact of the substation and transmission lines to it, but also the threat of fire, vandalism, even terrorism at the site.

CAKES members said that while the utility company is putting out its information about the PATH project, the firm has refused in some cases to answer questions by residents.

"They say we are interveners and they can't answer our questions," said Thurston. An intervener is someone who has signed up to speak at hearings on the proposal and question the project.

Gardner said she had attended open houses held by Allegheny Energy last year, but none of the maps at those events showed the proposed location of the substation.

Jenkins said he questioned the need for the power Allegheny Energy said it needs in the time frame stated. "It may have a lot to do with the 14.2 percent return they (Allegheny) are expecting to get," Jenkins said.

Thurston and other residents at the meeting said the site, bought by the utility company for \$6 million earlier this year, was chosen because it is where lines from Allegheny Energy, Potomac Electric Power Co. and Baltimore Gas & Electric come together.

The commissioners said one of their apprehensions is that the utility company will get approval by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission which has stated it wants a power corridor for the region as part of a national emergency system of electric power.

"We've been against that," Gardner said of FERC's authority, which would supersede local and state oversight. "Governors in other states have called for smaller generation systems." She said Frederick County has been "a target for all kinds of utilities," noting the PATH project and Dominion's push for a natural gas boosting station near Middletown.

Dick Ishler, a CAKES member, said in West Virginia, Allegheny Energy and its partner in PATH, American Electric Power, looked at multiple sites for a substation.

Ishler said the tour was an effort on the part of CAKES to show the commissioners the site and its potential impact on the surrounding area.

The utility company is awaiting a decision by the Maryland Public Service Commission on the filing of the PATH plan under Potomac Edison, a historic name still used on official documents by the company in Maryland. But the PSC questioned why



Photo by Travis Pratt

Frederick County Commissioners from left, Kai Hagan, Jan Gardner, Charles Jenkins, and Citizens Against the Kemptown Electric Substation member Dick Ishler gather around a map showing the proposed site for an electric substation near Mount Airy.

Potomac Edison, which only exists on paper, was used as the name for the filing of the project, rather than Allegheny Power or Allegheny Energy. The utility company's attorneys said there were legal and financial reasons, which are still being reviewed by the PSC.

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