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PATH opponents not sitting idle

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Even though the Potomac-Appalachian Transmission Highline project is on the shelf at least through 2011, opponents of the transmission line are not sitting idle.

Sugarloaf Conservancy filed a letter on Wednesday with the Maryland Public Service Commission responding to the withdrawal of the application for PATH on Monday. The organization has taken the offensive against any anticipated future reapplication by Potomac Edison or the PATH Companies.

In the letter, Sugarloaf Conservancy requests the PSC to consider a third-party analysis of PATH, alternatives and costs related to each.

The letter also asks for a forecast of energy needs for the next 15 years and a third-party analysis of any energy forecast by PJM Interconnector. PJM monitors the electric grid in the region and releases forecasts on energy needs.

Sugarloaf Conservancy has, in the past, disputed the predictions of PJM on energy needs, compared to data from the U.S. Department of Energy, which shows less immediate demand.

The letter also asks that any substation associated with PATH be approved for local zoning and land use. During hearings for PATH and the substation for the system, the Frederick County Planning Commission voted against the transmission line and substation. The Frederick County Board of Zoning Appeals voted against a special exception application for the substation. The Frederick County Commissioners voted to send a letter to the Maryland PSC opposing the project.

Sugarloaf Conservancy and Citizens Against the Kemptown Electric Substation were consistent opponents of the project, a 275-mile, \$2.1 billion power line starting in West Virginia, crossing Virginia and ending at the proposed substation near Mount Airy. The two organizations had challenged the need for the project with less electric use due to the economic downturn, asked the utility companies to look at alternatives including other transmission line routes and upgrades to alternative energy sources, and criticized the impact to the environment, safety and economy on the area.

Potomac Edison, a subsidiary of FirstEnergy, withdrew its applications in Maryland, Virginia and West Virginia on Monday. But the utility company said that it believes there is a need for more energy to meet demands at some point in the future.

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