

Friday, Oct. 15, 2010

Fate of PATH still undecided

Hearing, testimony scheduled to continue Nov. 18

by Tripp Laino | Staff Writer

Despite more than four additional hours of testimony on Thursday, the Frederick County Board of Zoning Appeals did not reach a decision on a special exemption for the proposed PATH substation.

Allegheny Energy is seeking a special exception to place the PATH (Potomac Appalachian Transmission Highline) substation in an area not zoned for its use, and is opposed by several groups, including Citizens Against Kempton Energy Substation (CAKES), who have yet to testify.

Thursday night's hearing was the second scheduled hearing, after more than 10 hours of testimony on Sept. 29. According to Lara Roholt Westdorp, the chairwoman of the board, the remaining testimony and public comment will take at least four hours to complete, but could likely take longer.

During the two hearings, Allegheny brought seven expert witnesses to testify on aspects of the substation that were of public concern, such as whether the substation qualifies as a carcinogen, the amount of electro-magnetic frequency it generates and the noise that it will create during operation. The testimony from their experts concluded Thursday, with testimony on how the landscaping will shield the substation from view, and on why Kempton was chosen for the site.

Between the two hearings, PATH representatives met with representatives from Frederick County Fire and Rescue services, in an attempt to address the concerns about issues of fighting potential fires at the site. The firefighters made suggestions to PATH, such as storing water at the site, improving the water pressure of surrounding areas, and storing fire-suppressing foam, which will be useful for putting out fires from the oil-based transformers. A letter detailing this interaction was read into the record during the hearing.

The substation has already hit several roadblocks in the county. At a meeting on Sept. 15, the Frederick County Planning and Zoning Commission voted unanimously to reject the PATH substation because it is not consistent with the county's comprehensive plan.

The PATH is a proposed high-voltage power line that originally called for a 765-kilovolt line from Amos, W.Va., to Beddington, W.Va., and twin 500-kilovolt lines that would have connected to a proposed substation in Kempton, located southwest of Mount Airy.

During the course of planning since 2008, the company decided to only construct one continuous 765-kilovolt line from Amos to Kempton, eliminating the connection with the Beddington substation. Allegheny was forced to change its plans because it was unable to find a route through several communities in Berkeley County, W.Va.

PATH will serve PJM Interconnection, a regional organization that coordinates power transmission in 13 states and Washington, D.C. PJM initially projected the transmission line would be needed by 2012 to prevent grid failure, but has moved back the deadline date to 2014.

The power line and associated substations are expected to cost \$2.1 billion, and would bring electricity from a coal-fired power station in southeastern West Virginia to population centers to its east. Allegheny's expected portion of those costs is expected to be about \$1.4 billion, according to information from the PATH website.

The cost of the power line would be distributed among rate payers throughout PJM's service area, with Maryland residents expecting to see an increase of 85 cents per month on their bill.

PATH is a joint venture of Allegheny Energy and American Electric Power, and both companies maintain the

multistate power line is necessary to maintain reliable electric service in the region.

K.C. Reed, a civil engineer who spoke about the landscaping on the property, said the construction would disturb 7.58 acres of the forest on the property, but that the company will plant more trees than they remove.

"We'll fix by planting more than 22.38 acres of trees of reforestation in an attempt to protect the existing forest," he said. "This allows [PATH] to disturb as little as possible."

He also said the site did not have evidence of any endangered species, so there would be no issue of loss of habitat for protected animals.

Michael Gogol, an Allegheny representative, said this site was chosen because of the 500-kilovolt parallel power lines located on the site, which will tie into the substation. "[They] specifically identified these two lines that must connect to the substation," he said. "[Kemptown] is the only place in the county that the lines are parallel."

Extended cross-examination from residents extended Allegheny's expert testimony until late in the evening.

The hearing is scheduled to continue on Nov 18, in the first floor hearing room of Winchester Hall, 12 E. Church St., Frederick. The board is attempting to schedule an afternoon hearing in addition to their regularly scheduled evening hearing, but times have not been set.

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To learn more

The Frederick County Board of Zoning Appeals has tentative dates set public hearings for the zoning request.

Nov. 18, times to be announced

Winchester Hall, first-floor hearing room, 12 E. Church St., Frederick

Visit www.frederickcountymd.gov or call Rick Brace at 301-600-2940. Those who cannot attend the meeting can e-mail RBrace@frederickcountymd.gov with the e-mail subject of "D-10-08."