

Friday, Nov. 12, 2010

PATH special exception hearing to continue Saturday

Opponents' testimony will detail worries of fire, view obstruction and noise to surrounding communities

by Tripp Laino | Staff Writer

The Frederick County Board of Zoning Appeals is scheduled to continue the hearing for the proposed PATH substation from 9 a.m. to 11 p.m. Saturday.

Allegheny Energy is seeking a special exception to place the Potomac Appalachian Transmission Highline (PATH) substation on land not zoned for its use. The project is opposed by several groups including Citizens Against the Kemptown Electrical Substation (CAKES), the Sierra Club and the Sugarloaf Conservancy, which will have representatives testify on Saturday.

Doug Kaplan, president of the Sugarloaf Conservancy, said the three groups have worked together to compile testimony against the station for a variety of reasons.

"The fact that whether it be the view, whether it be the noise, whether it be the other issues — the [Frederick County] Planning Commission already found it inconsistent with the comprehensive plan," he said. "That's one major consideration."

Kaplan also said he plans to discuss the potential ramifications of a fire at the substation, a topic which has been discussed at previous PATH meetings.

Between the Sept. 29 and Oct. 14 hearings, PATH representatives met with Frederick County firefighters in an attempt to address the concerns about 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 possible fires from the oil-based transformers. A letter detailing this interaction was read into the record during the Oct. 14 hearing.

"It is very scary, as far as what might happen," Kaplan said. "I'm not trying to say it's something that's likely — thank God it's not likely — but we've all learned accidents do happen, and if it did, it would be catastrophic."

The Oct. 14 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 likely could take longer.

During the previous 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 Oct. 14.

The hearing will take place in the first floor hearing room of Winchester Hall, 12 E. Church St., Frederick. There will be breaks at noon for lunch and at 5:30 p.m. for dinner.

The PATH is a proposed high-voltage power line that will serve PJM Interconnection, a regional organization that coordinates power transmission in 13 states, including those through which it passes, 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 east. 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.

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

tlaino@gazette.net