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Group rejects a request to meet on power line plan

Conservancy's participation in PSC proceedings changes dialogue, industry spokesman says

by Christian Brown | Staff Writer

A group fighting a proposed 275-mile power line that would end in Frederick County is disappointed that an industry group formed to defend the project won't meet with them.

The Sugarloaf Conservancy wanted to meet with Russell Frisby, a former Public Service Commission chairman and spokesman for the industry group.

The conservancy opposes the Potomac-Appalachian Transmission Highline, or PATH, because they fear the line would damage their health and reduce their property values.

Supporters say the line, which would run from West Virginia to southeastern Frederick County, would improve the regional power grid's capacity. It would be constructed by Allegheny Power and American Electric Power.

Companies formed the PATH Education and Awareness Team, or PEAT, to advocate for the line as criticism for PATH mounted in the affected states.

Members of PEAT are paid to answer criticisms and correct "myths" about PATH, according to the group's Web site.

But they aren't paid to debate with people who've already made up their mind about PATH, said Frisby, PEAT's chief spokesman in Maryland.

Frisby said the conservancy has filed as interveners in PATH's application before the PSC.

"The fact that they are active in the case changes the nature of the dialogue," Frisby said. "I am not the company's lawyer."

The conservancy plans a meeting for Saturday and asked Frisby to reconsider.

The conservancy's members hoped Frisby would want to hear and address their concerns.

"Our request for you to speak was presented in an effort to reach out and hear other points of view," the letter states.

Frisby said PEAT was intended to engage the news media and local entities such as chambers of commerce, and would not hold open houses. He said such formal public meetings would eventually be held by the Maryland Public Service Commission, and corresponding bodies in Virginia and West Virginia.

"We don't want to replicate public-type hearings," he said.

PEAT's Web site, pathawareness.com, maintains a petition for supporters of PATH to voice their opinion. Frisby said he did not know how many people had signed the petition.

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