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Opponents expected denial of PATH application

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The president of a group that has been challenging Allegheny Power on its PATH project said denial of the utility company's application wasn't a surprise.

Doug Kaplan, president of Sugarloaf Conservancy, said Thursday he believed the application would be turned down during a hearing before the Maryland Public Service Commission in July.

The Public Service Commission decision was a 3-1 vote, with Commissioner Lawrence Brenner dissenting. Brenner said he felt the commission had the authority to approve the application on the PATH Allegheny name. Commission Chairman Douglas Nazarian and members Harold Williams and Susanne Brogan voted against the application.

Kaplan, who heads the grassroots residents' organization made up of those in the proposed path of the power line and other concerned individuals, noted the utility company's failure was because it tried to apply under the name "PATH Allegheny."

That entity, basically created to act as the overseer of the project, is not an electric company under the PSC's definition.

Kaplan said if Allegheny Power had used the name Potomac Edison, still considered a legal entity in Maryland, the outcome could have been different.

The Potomac Appalachian Transmission Highline, or PATH, is a nearly 300-mile, high voltage power line that would begin in West Virginia, cross part of Virginia and about 20 miles in Maryland. The line, a joint project of Allegheny Power and American Electric Power, is estimated to cost \$1.8 billion. Utility company executives argue that the line is necessary to meet a growing demand for energy in the Mid-Atlantic Region.

In a statement released Thursday, Allegheny Power said the companies remain committed to the project and having it online by 2014.

The statement noted that the utility companies would "continue to move forward with approval proceedings in West Virginia and Virginia, as options concerning the Maryland segment of the line are considered."

The line would have ended at a proposed substation near Mount Airy. In its decision, released late Wednesday, the PSC stated that the substation, labeled as "Kemptown," is actually in Mount Airy and could be a point of confusion for residents. Allegheny Power said it chose the name because there is an existing substation in Mount Airy.

Another grassroots organization, Citizens Against the Kemptown Electric Substation, said the site was surrounded by 1,200 homes. The station, they say, would be a danger to the community, citing potential fire or environmental damage, as well as look ugly. The planned substation would be as big as 32 football fields, eclipsed in size only by a massive substation in Korea.

Allegheny Power said the location, off Bartholow's Road and Cowman Manor Drive, was chosen because it is where lines merge from that firm, as well as Potomac Electric Power Co. and Baltimore Gas and Electric Co. The utility company paid \$6 million for the 150 acres of land, of which 41 acres will be used for the proposed substation.

Todd Meyers, external communications manager for Allegheny Power, said Wednesday evening that the company was in the process of reviewing the decision and considering its next step.

The company has 30 days to present its intention to the PSC.

"The PSC wants an idea what Allegheny will do," Kaplan said.

He said the application decision was made only about the name impropriety. In its stated remarks, the PSC says the decision does not reflect on the merits of the overall project.



Photo by Staff file photo by Sam Yu

The Potomac Appalachian Transmission Highline, or PATH, is a nearly 300-mile, high voltage power line that would begin in West Virginia, cross part of Virginia and about 20 miles in Maryland. The proposed plan has met with much opposition from residents concerned about its impact on their land and lives.

One aspect of the project is how much influence Frederick County officials will have on it. In its statement, the PSC says the question of authority over the proposed substation remains, based on whether the substation would be considered an "integral" part of the transmission line. That aspect would be determined later, if the utility company submits a new application and it is approved and the process moves forward.

"I think that shows that the PSC may give a strong say to the county in the process," Kaplan said.

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