

Thursday, Sept. 23, 2010

PATH power line and substation continue to draw ire

Frederick County Planning Commission unanimously rejected substation plans; appeal hearing set for Wednesday

by Tripp Laino | Staff Writer

The battle about a proposed power substation that Allegheny Energy wants to build near Mount Airy continues to rage, with both residents and county officials pushing back against the construction.

At a meeting on Sept. 15, the Frederick County Planning and Zoning Commission voted unanimously to reject the Potomac Appalachian Transmission Highline 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 Kemptown, 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 Kemptown, 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, 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. 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.

Allegheny staged a media day last week to share information about the ways the company is working to hide the station using trees and the natural terrain. The event drew about 25 protesters, who stood in front of Allegheny's offices on West Patrick Street waving signs at cars, and followed the media day presenters to Mount Airy when the presentation moved to the Kemptown site.

The project has been opposed by residents and groups since it was proposed in 2008. Residents of communities on Bartholows Road in Mount Airy where the substation would be built formed the Citizens Against the Kemptown Substation to voice their opposition to the acres of electrical equipment built near their homes, which they worry could lower property values and threaten the health of their families and the local environment.

Esther Brinkman, one of the group's members, said she lives about a mile from the substation, and is concerned about having to look at the station on a day-to-day basis.

"I don't want to drive by it every day," she said. "I have beautiful trees in my neighborhood. In the winter, the leaves will be gone and I won't see the beautiful sunset anymore. It would ruin the neighborhood."

Brinkman also said she was concerned about potential attacks on the substation, and she thought it could be prone to

a potential terrorist attack, as the line would provide power to a large area on the east coast.

Allegheny Power has taken steps to address residents' concerns, both from a safety standpoint and to protect the area from becoming an eyesore. The company said substation's equipment only would occupy about 43 acres of the purchased area, and the remainder of the 170 acres would be a "buffer" to screen equipment from view.

Meyers said he couldn't delve into specifics about the company's security plan for the site, but said the site will be secure from potential issues. "There will be adequate security measures," he said. "It'll be monitored 24-7."

The next potential issue for the substation is an exemption to a Frederick County zoning, as the potential substation is in an area zoned for agriculture use, and cannot be used for commercial use, as the substation would be. Allegheny has filed for an exemption to this usage.

The Frederick County Board of Zoning Appeals has set a public hearing for the zoning request, which will take place on Wednesday at 1 and 7 p.m. in the first floor hearing room of Winchester Hall, located at 12 E. Church St., Frederick.

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-When: 1 and 7 p.m. Wednesday

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

-FYI: Visit www.frederickcounty

md.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."

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