

FrederickNewsPost.com**Planners: PATH not compatible**

Originally published October 22, 2010

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It's bad news and good news for the multibillion-dollar transmission-line project known as PATH.

The bad news is the Frederick County Planning Commission found the project doesn't fit the county's comprehensive plan. The commission voted 5-0 Wednesday night against the project.

The good news is that in Virginia, the State Corporation Commission, which oversees utilities, is moving forward with the project and will hold public meetings in February.

Jim Gugel, the county's chief planner, said the five planning commission members found the proposed transmission line inconsistent with the comprehensive plan.

The Potomac-Appalachian Transmission Highline is a \$2.1 billion, 275-mile electric power project that will begin in West Virginia, cross Virginia and about 20 miles in Maryland, ending with a proposed substation near Mount Airy.

The Maryland Public Service Commission had already moved to begin meeting on PATH. In West Virginia, the project application was delayed at the request of Allegheny Energy, a partner in PATH with American Electric Power.

Doug Kaplan, president of Sugarloaf Conservancy, which opposes the project, said he was disappointed with Virginia's decision.

"(Members of the State Corporation Commission) ignored the comments from their staff," Kaplan said.

The staff, he said, had recommended denying the project or delaying it for more information from the utility company.

Gugel said the Frederick County Planning Commission found the project inconsistent because of such issues as the impact on scenic views, especially of nearby Sugarloaf Mountain; stormwater runoff during construction; and property values. They also questioned the need for the project.

In September, the commission voted unanimously that the proposed substation did not meet the comprehensive plan. The county's Board of Zoning Appeals is continuing hearings on the substation, for which the utility company has applied for a special exception.

Potomac Edison and PATH LLC, which are the entities for the PATH project in Maryland, argue the Maryland Public Service Commission and not the county has the final say on the substation. The county argues it legally has that authority and is holding the public meetings on the facility.

In a statement, the Virginia State Corporation Commission states PATH is within the National Interest Electric Transmission Corridor designated by the U.S. Department of Energy.

"If the commission has not acted within one year from the filing (which was on Sept. 20), jurisdiction over the project could possibly shift to the federal government."

Public hearings for the three Virginia counties crossed by PATH will be forthcoming by the commission. A hearing, set for April 25, 2011, in Richmond, Va., has been finalized, according to the statement.

Allegheny Energy says PATH is needed to ensure reliable electric power and avoid potential blackouts by 2015.

Opponents, including Kaplan's group and Citizens Against the Kempton Electric Substation, say the project isn't needed and would create negative impacts on aesthetics, safety, the environment and more.

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