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### Planning commission finds substation plans lacking

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The Frederick County Planning Commission has found that a proposed substation near Mount Airy is inconsistent with the county's comprehensive plan.

The commission voted on Wednesday night to find it not consistent with the county's comprehensive plan.

That finding has no bearing on another proceeding pending before Frederick County. On Sept. 29, the Frederick County Board of Zoning Appeals is scheduled to consider a special exception zoning request for the proposed substation.

At Wednesday's hearing, Frederick County Commissioner Kai Hagen said he wants to look into the county's ability to extinguish fires at the proposed Kemptown electric substation near Mount Airy.

Hagen, a Democrat, said he plans to ask the commissioners today to request an opinion from the director of the Frederick County Division of Fire and Rescue Services.

The topic came up at a Frederick County Planning Commission hearing on the proposed substation Wednesday evening.

The commission is considering whether the substation is consistent with the Frederick County Comprehensive Plan, a long-term plan for the future of the county that focuses on land use.

The substation is a critical part of the proposed Potomac Appalachian Transmission Highline, a high-voltage transmission line proposed by Potomac Edison Co.

It has attracted opposition from potential neighbors.

About 200 people attended Wednesday's hearing, packing the first-floor hearing room of Winchester Hall. The planning commission directed others to watch the hearing from a lunchroom on the third floor after the room reached capacity.

One of the objections raised by Richard Ishler, a Mount Airy resident representing Citizens Against the Kemptown Electric Substation, was the facility of the proposed magnitude posed a fire threat to residential neighborhoods nearby.

There are 1,300 homes near the proposed substation, he said.

Ishler said, based on conversations with Tom Owens, the director of fire and rescue services, the county might not possess adequate foam to fight a substation fire.

Because no one from fire and rescue services was present, Hagen said he would like to get the facts on emergency response. At a commissioners meeting this morning, he plans to ask the commissioners if they will request information from Owens directly.

The proposed substation is about 41 acres, a little more than double the footprint of the Francis Scott Key mall building, according to county planners.

It will be sited on about 170 acres with extensive landscaping along property boundaries, according to Mike Gogol, a consulting engineer with Allegheny Power.



Photo by Staff file photo by Sam Yu

The proposed Kemptown substation has been a point of contention for more than a year, as both proponents and opponents of the Potomac Appalachian Transmission Highline continue to voice their opinions about the tentative location of electrical lines.

Gogol told the planning commission that Allegheny chose the proposed site because it is where several power lines meet. Building the substation there would eliminate the need to run lines to an area where they are not located.

Additionally, he said the proposed siting was designed to be in compliance with the county's historic preservation goals.

Allegheny Power spokesman Todd Meyers said the company will be able to continue agricultural use of the land underneath the lines.

A topic of concern was the lighting that would be installed on the substation.

Doug Kaplan, president of the Sugarloaf Conservancy, which opposes PATH, said the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission requires adequate lighting.

"If they decide to light it up, it will be like a Super Bowl every night," Kaplan said.

Mike Hosier, general manager of extra high-voltage engineering projects at Allegheny, said that would not be the case. The substation would need lighting only during times of maintenance.

For instance, the Doubs substation, north of Point of Rocks, is not routinely lit. There is a construction project going on there, Hosier said.

Residents expressed concerns about an adverse effect on property values, increased noise, health dangers and the visibility of the substation.

Most of the equipment for the substation will be between 35 and 55 feet tall, with 18 transmission towers ranging in height from 130 feet to 175 feet. That is the height of existing towers there, but there will be 15 new towers.

The planning commission spent several hours listening to testimony Wednesday evening.

Their determination will have no bearing on a Board of Appeals review of a special exception request for the substation, scheduled for Sept. 29.

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