

FrederickNewsPost.com**PATH substation near Mount Airy denied in zoning vote**

Originally published November 19, 2010

By [Ed Waters Jr.](#)

The application for an electric substation as a special exception near Mount Airy was denied Thursday night in a 2-to-1 vote.

The substation, part of the Potomac Appalachian Transmission Highline, would be located on Bartholows Road in an agricultural zone.

John R. Clapp, a member of the Frederick County Board of Zoning Appeals, moved to deny the application, seconded by Carole Jaar Sepe.

Clapp said the substation was not consistent with the neighborhood of about 1,350 houses surrounding the 150-acre site. He said the proposed substation did not fit with the county's comprehensive plan for rural and residential development. Sepe agreed.

Clapp said the magnitude of the project, which would include 42 acres of galvanized steel and 175-foot towers, did not fit the criteria of the zoning ordinance for nongovernment utilities in an agricultural zone.

Sepe questioned reports from the utility company on the impact on water supplies in the area and on wetlands and the environment.

Lara Roholt Westdorp, chairwoman, voted against the motion. "There are elements of the motion I don't agree with," Westdorp said. At the start of the two-hour meeting, Westdorp threatened to clear the hearing room after outbursts from the audience.

Westdorp thanked everyone, from representatives of PATH Allegheny and Potomac Edison, to residents, who had sat through four meetings, some lasting more than 12 hours. The board members had to review piles of documents, transcripts of testimony and presentations by both sides before Thursday's meeting.

Dick Ishler, president of Citizens Against the Kemptown Electric Substation, credited the "logical and factual" presentations by his group and others with persuading the board to deny the application. "I'm proud of all of our people who kept to the facts and didn't melt down to emotion." Ishler said he was optimistic that logic and facts will continue to prevail against the substation plan. "We won't let our guard down."

"The PATH upgrade is critical to ensure the continued reliability of the regional electrical transmission system, which will benefit Marylanders, including those who reside in Frederick County. Regardless of the outcome of the special exception process, I commend the many residents, expert witnesses and board members who politely delivered and endured hours upon hours of testimony. We certainly recognize that the siting of the Kemptown substation is an extremely complex and emotional issue," said Todd Meyers, spokesman for Allegheny Power.

"Keep in mind that the Maryland Public Service Commission has previously ruled that it would have jurisdiction over the construction and siting of the Kemptown substation if it is determined that the substation is an integral and necessary component of the PATH project, the line cannot be built without it. We intend to make that case," Meyers said.

Westdorp had argued that the county's comprehensive plan was a guide, "and the zoning ordinance is law." In September, the county's planning commission had voted against the substation and the PATH transmission line in two separate decisions.

The utility company may appeal the zoning board's decision in court or take it to the Maryland Public Service Commission. The county has argued that while the PSC has authority over the transmission line, the county should have the final say on the substation. PATH is a 275-mile electric transmission line system from West Virginia, through Virginia and about 20 miles of Maryland to the substation.

Utility company executives say the system is needed to avoid potential blackouts resulting from insufficient power by 2015.

Opponents say the plan is not needed considering the economy and alternative energy possibilities. Opponents also argue the negative effect on the environment, aesthetics, safety and property values of residents around the substation site.

Please send comments to [webmaster](#) or contact us at 301-662-1177.

Copyright 1997-10 Randall Family, LLC. All rights reserved. Do not duplicate or redistribute in any form.
The Frederick News-Post [Privacy Policy](#). Use of this site indicates your agreement to our [Terms of Service](#).