

No Path for PATH

BY CARRIE DIETZ

Just days before a Frederick County civic group met October 21 to urge opposition to the Potomac Appalachian Transmission Highline (PATH), Allegheny Power and American Electric Power announced it wants to reconfigure its route and install a smaller power line.

The power company said instead of pushing for two giant 500 kilovolt lines, it will now look at a single 765 kilovolt line and eliminate a substation in West Virginia.

"Instead, plans now call to avoid Bedington altogether in favor of building a new substation in the area of eastern Grant County, northern Hardy County or southern Hampshire County where overloading an existing line is not an issue," said Allegheny Power spokesperson Todd Meyers. "From the new substation, we'd head to Kemptown -- a solution that PJM has confirmed will meet all reliability standards."

Meanwhile the newly formed Sugarloaf Conservancy met a few days later at the Urbana Fire Hall to seek public support for an in-

■ PATH

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dependent study, to change the technology the company will use when it does build the line and to have that line put underground. "We are not saying 'no' to power lines," said Doug Kaplon, president of the group. "We realize the need for power. But there are better ways to do it."

The group wants to see a composite core cable used to better transmit power. One member, Kim Gregory of Glacial Energy, said the technology is lighter because it is made of aluminum instead of steel, does not corrode and can carry more voltage. "Why use a cable that was developed in 1898? Use one developed in 2005," he said.

Kaplon also called for an independent study for the future power line. "I don't trust the statements of Allegheny Power," he said in his opening remarks to a crowd of about 100.

Mark Gaffigan of the General Accounting Office was among the speakers at the public meeting and said PATH is part of the National Interest Electric Transmission Corridor, an area that can be trumped by

the federal government if a state can't come to a timely, effective decision.

Meyers said the company has pushed back its planned filing date with state regulators for PATH from December to early next year, probably in the March 2009 timeframe.

"We plan to file an application with state regulatory commissions, including the Maryland Public Service Commission, that demonstrates both the need for the line and that an appropriate route has been selected," he said. At that point, regulators will convene formal, on-the-record public input and evidentiary hearings. "They'll also perform independent review of the need, routing and myriad other aspects of the project. This complex legal process could last at least a year.

Gearing up for another round, Kaplon asked Frederick County residents to sign an open letter to Allegheny Power and American Electric Power to publicly address a number of questions including efforts to seek public opinion and alternative technologies.

More information: www.sugarloafconservancy.org or www.pathtransmission.org.