

**FrederickNewsPost.com****West Virginia staff advises dismissing PATH application**

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The staff of the Public Service Commission of West Virginia is recommending dismissing a 300-mile power line project that will end in Frederick County.

The Potomac Appalachian Transmission Highline, or PATH, is a nearly 300-mile, \$1.8 billion proposal to construct an electrical transmission line from West Virginia, through Virginia and end in Maryland at a proposed substation near Mount Airy.

The action follows a similar recommendation made Oct. 19 by the staff of the Virginia State Corporation Commission.

Maryland's Public Service Commission rejected the application for the project in September. Allegheny Energy, jointly planning the project with American Electric Power, said it is considering its next move.

The move by Maryland's PSC was important to West Virginia's recommendation, staff said.

"Almost 50 days after the dismissal by the Maryland PSC, however, PATH's joint venturer, PE (Potomac Edison), has not filed an application for regulatory approval in Maryland and has left this commission with the possibly futile task of reviewing the application for an incomplete project," stated the motion, presented to West Virginia commission members Wednesday.

Nearly 225 miles of the project will be in West Virginia.

The utility companies have failed to provide economic forecasts and electrical load forecasts that would show the need for the PATH project, staff said.

Sarah Robertson, a spokeswoman with the public information office for the West Virginia PSC, said Thursday there is no timeline to answer the staff's request.

The only time concern is the 400-day statutory deadline for a final decision in the case -- June 21, 2010, Robertson said.

Todd Meyers, an Allegheny Energy spokesman, said the company is reviewing the staff motion.

Allegheny Energy and American Electric Power remain committed to the PATH project, he said.

The line is needed "to strengthen the regional transmission grid and resolve reliability concerns on the existing system," he said.

Meyers said the company's response to the similar motion for a dismissal in Virginia had been to emphasize that the terminus of the PATH project remains at the Kemptown substation. Although located near Mount Airy, the name "Kemptown" was used on the proposed substation since a smaller one already exists in Mount Airy.

"A decision with regard to a possible refiling of an application for approval of the PATH project in Maryland will be announced in the near future," Meyers said. "I cannot offer a precise timeframe."

After a hearing in July, the Maryland PSC voted 3-1 to reject the application for PATH. The rejection was based primarily on the issue that the utility company was filing the application for PATH Allegheny LLC rather than the accepted Maryland corporate entity, Potomac Edison, for such applications. The Maryland PSC did not reject the project itself in the decision, only the legality of the application.

Two grass-roots organizations have formed to oppose the PATH project and substation. Sugarloaf Conservancy has focused on the transmission line and the need for additional electric power in the timeframe as stated by the utility companies.

Citizens Against the Kemptown Electric Substation includes many people whose property would be affected by the substation site off Bartholow's Road, as well as those who are concerned about the health and safety issues of the facility.

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