

FrederickNewsPost.com**PATH opponents voice objections to substation near Mount Airy**

Originally published November 14, 2010

By **Ed Waters Jr.**

More than 40 speakers provided testimony against the proposed electric substation near Mount Airy on Saturday.

Speakers from the Citizens Against the Kempton Electric Substation (CAKES), Sugarloaf Conservancy and Sierra Club, as well as residents around the proposed site on Bartholows Road, took the microphone at Winchester Hall.

They will find out what the Frederick County Board of Zoning Appeals decides on the issue at its next meeting, at 7 p.m. Thursday at Winchester Hall.

Lara Roholt Westdorp, chairwoman, said the board members would discuss and decide on the issue at that meeting.

Saturday's meeting, which began at 9 a.m. and ended about 10 p.m., was before the Frederick County Board of Zoning Appeals. PATH Allegheny and Potomac Edison applied to the board seeking a special exception for the substation, part of the Potomac Appalachian Transmission Highline project. The utility companies say the project, a \$2.1 billion, 275-mile system, is needed to ensure adequate power for future needs in the region.

A decision by the appeals board could wind up in court either way. If the board turns down the application, the utility companies can seek judgment in court. If the application is approved, the citizen groups could appeal the decision in court as well.

The utility companies have argued that Frederick County does not have the final say on the substation. The utility companies say that because the power lines fall under the authority of the Maryland Public Service Commission, and because the substation is part of PATH, the state commission should have the ultimate decision.

The hearing Saturday was the third for the zoning board on the substation. At the previous meetings, representatives of the utility companies explained the need for the project, the engineering and design aspects, noise and other factors.

The third hearing was for the opposition, where speakers spoke out against the siting of the substation in a "doughnut hole" surrounded by 1,350 houses; the negative impact on aesthetics, environment, safety and other areas of concern.

While the meeting room at Winchester Hall was filled to capacity during the day, after a two-hour dinner break the number of audience members fell from more than 200 to less than half that. The funds are needed to pay legal fees and other costs for the grass-roots group to combat the proposed substation.

Scott Miller, attorney for CAKES, said that the Frederick County Planning Commission had voted against the substation and the PATH transmission line proposal, saying that neither fit the county's comprehensive plan.

Wayne Six, a Frederick real estate appraiser, said he had been asked to review three properties near the proposed subdivision site. Six said the facility would have a detrimental effect, pulling down property values of 12.5 to 20 percent for the three houses. Six said he had no specific data on the effect of substations on property values, but considering the size of the project -- equal to the Pentagon or two Francis Scott Key Malls -- and towers taller than the Statue of Liberty created a "wonderful example of external obsolescence" in determining the drop in value. "There is no gray area here, it is black-and-white, it is nasty in terms of property values." Six called proposed berms and tree plantings to screen the substation "a Band-Aid, not a solution."

Tamar Osterman, who covers local government affairs for the Frederick County Association of Realtors, urged the board to deny the application, citing the loss of property values and the fact the planning commission had already rejected it.

Former Frederick Mayor Jeff Holtzinger, an engineer and lawyer, said the site proposed should be in Rural Reserve, designed to preserve the agricultural part of the county. "You are totally reshaping 50 acres of earth," Holtzinger said. The proposed substation would sit on 42 acres of a 150-acre site. PATH Allegheny purchased the land in 2009 for \$6.8 million.

Representatives of the Sugarloaf Conservancy, as did other speakers, noted the potential health hazards from electromagnetic emissions that some studies link to diseases such as leukemia and Alzheimer's. The group also emphasized looking at alternative energy sources and the potential for fires at the facility. In an earlier meeting, the county's director of fire and rescue services



Photo by Bill Green

Residents wait their turn to speak on Saturday at a meeting of the Frederick County Board of Zoning Appeals on the proposed PATH substation near Mount Airy.

said a fire at the substation would have to burn itself out as there was no local equipment that could put it out. The added danger, Chief Tom Owens said, was from toxic smoke from the substation that would mean evacuation of nearby homes.

Alana Wase, conservation program coordinator for the Sierra Club, disputed the need for PATH, saying the utility companies should look at renewable energy and citing the pollution factor of increased use of coal at generating plants on West Virginia. PATH will begin in West Virginia, cross Virginia and about 20 miles of Maryland. Wase said PATH LLC simply chose the Bartholows Road site for convenience because it is close to the junction of lines already in place.

The speakers who followed expressed themselves emotionally at times, citing worries of terrorist attacks on the substation, pollution of their wells and air, excessive noise and traffic, and adverse impact visually and on wildlife.

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