

Coral Gables hosts public hearing on FPL power lines

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South Florida residents can comment on Florida Power and Light's proposal to build high-voltage power lines through South Miami-Dade at public hearings this week and next.

The lines would run from Turkey Point to Coconut Grove, through parts of Cutler Bay, Pinecrest, South Miami and Coral Gables.

Coral Gables sued FPL two weeks ago, charging that the utility had violated its longstanding franchise agreement with the city by proposing to build poles up to 100 feet in height and four feet wide, strung with 230-kilovolt lines, northward along the portion of Ponce de Leon Boulevard that runs parallel to U.S. 1.

Currently, the city's agreement with FPL, which runs through 2028, stipulates that the poles range from 54 to 80 feet high and no more than three feet wide.

In addition, Coral Gables has taken issue with the proposed power lines' voltage.

Coral Gables hosts a public testimony session at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, July 18, at the War Memorial Youth Center, 405 University Dr., Coral Gables. The hearing is intended to gather public input as part of a certification process overseen by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. Florida Administrative Law Judge D.R. Alexander will run the meeting. He will write a recommendation to Gov. Scott and his Cabinet in October.

Members of the public may address any issue related to approval of the project.

In its filing, Coral Gables has asked Miami-Dade Circuit Court for a declaratory judgment, citing a 30-year franchise agreement that began in 1998 and granted FPL the right to erect, own and maintain its electric system in the city using 138-kilovolt transmission lines. The city maintains that the newer, more powerful lines violate the agreement because the size and voltage is no longer customary. The current agreement allows the utility to operate within the city's right-of-way and the city contends the governor and Cabinet have no jurisdiction over it. Scott and his Cabinet, who compose the state's Power Siting Board, are expected to make a decision on the lines in December.

"The city and its residents will be irreparably harmed by the visual impacts, massive and over burdensome proposed power poles and lines," the suit reads.

"The city filed this lawsuit to protect its right-of-way and the quality of life of its citizens along the right-of-way," Coral Gables Attorney Craig Leen said.

According to the agreement, "FPL is committed to only putting power lines that were customary in the late 1990s. The type of poles being proposed by FPL now are not customary, nor the transmission lines they are proposing which is a much higher voltage," Leen said. "The city's principle position is the power lines should be underground.

Alternatively, if that's not done we have an alternate corridor which is the existing corridor. This lawsuit doesn't resolve all the issues. We still have the other proceeding before the administrative judge."

Leen is referring to an earlier proposal presented by the communities that sought to have the new lines underground or running through existing corridors further west in Kendall, from Southwest 136th Street to Flagler Street between 107th and 97th Avenues. Kendall residents have balked at the plan.

FPL's preferred route is along U.S. 1 and has long argued that putting the lines underground would be too expensive and raise costs by five to eight times, said FPL project manager Steve Scroggs.

Read more here: <http://www.miamiherald.com/2013/07/16/3503107/coral-gables-hosts-public-hearing.html#storylink=cpy>