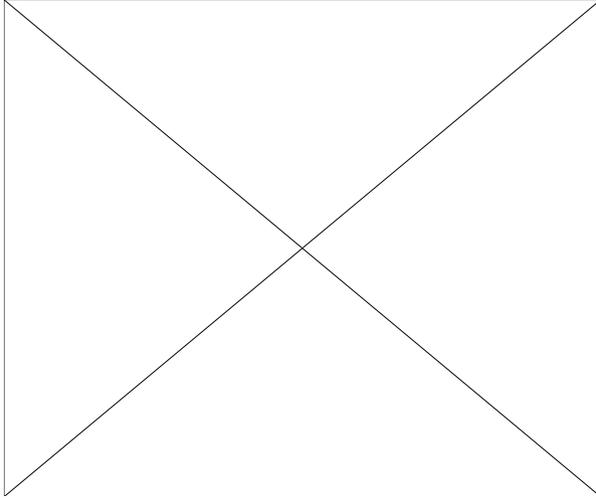


Power line expansion opposition groups form coalition

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By Adam Clayton Columbia-Greene Media Register-Star

COLUMBIA COUNTY — Organizations and municipalities opposed to the currently proposed expansion and upgrade of power lines in New York state have recently united to form a coalition to pool resources. Power line upgrades are part of Gov. Andrew Cuomo's New York State Energy Highway, and have been the subject of much resistance over the past year due to the potential of land loss for state residents.



Some of the project outlines submitted by the four bidders vying to upgrade the lines require widened rights-of-way under existing lines and towers. The additional land required would be obtained from residents using eminent domain.

The Public Service Commission is responsible for assigning the expansion to the winning company. Recently, the PSC updated the proposed February end date for information gathering to an indefinite date. Originally the polling period was to end in December. The PSC previously pushed that deadline back to February, and most recently has pushed it back indefinitely.

The Columbia County Board of Supervisors and the towns of Claverack, Stuyvesant, Stockport, and Livingston have all passed resolutions denouncing any upgrade plans that would seize land through eminent domain or upset the bucolic or historical nature of Columbia County.

Numerous civilian groups have sprung up in order to combat the upgrades including Farmers and Families for Livingston and Farmers and Families for Claverack.

According to Pam Kline, who is the head of Farmers and Families for Livingston, Administrative Law Judge David Prestemon at the Public Service Commission told many groups applying for intervenor funds that they could secure more funding with a larger group.

The intervenor funds were put in place by the four vying companies. Interested parties can apply for them to help fund their own analyses of the effects on their communities of the proposed upgrades.

Ian Solomon, head of Farmers and Families of Claverack, said the two Farmers and Families groups took the idea and ran with it. In early December of last year, they gathered together groups in Columbia, Ulster and Dutchess counties who have a vested interest in not seeing lands lost to eminent domain.

Solomon said that was a preliminary meeting, and that the coalition officially formed in early January.

The coalition is comprised of: Scenic Hudson, the town of Clinton, Clinton Concerned Citizens, Dutchess County, Dutchess Land Conservancy, Farmers and Families for Claverack, Farmers and Families for Livingston, the town of Milan, the Olana Partnership, Omega Institute, the Preservation League of New York State, the town of Pleasant Valley and Winnakee Land Trust.

Previously, Prestemon awarded intervenor funds to Farmers and Families, Scenic Hudson and the town of Milan before suggesting that these groups form a larger coalition.

Kline said they have not yet applied for funds as a coalition, but that is the next step.

The first order of business for the coalition was to draft a letter to Cuomo in response to the New York state PSC transmission upgrade comparative proceeding, known as Case #13-E-0488.

An excerpt from the letter states: "We have formed a coalition to effectively and efficiently intervene in the PSC proceeding, to provide unified or coordinated comments on the scope of the review, and to hire consultants who will assist us in providing comments during Parts A and B."

Solomon said the first two coalition meetings were very productive.

"All of us are working together. We all face the same issues and have pooled our resources to become more effective," Solomon said.

The coalition presented seven points it wanted to convey to Cuomo in the letter it drafted and sent.

- The effect on property values and businesses, halting additional building projects.
- Cuomo's commitment to building any new transmission capacity within existing three-dimensional corridors, as mentioned in the State of the State.
- Favoring underground transmission wires.
- Extended tower length affecting the bucolic nature of the Hudson Valley.
- Policies favoring locally-generated renewable power, other types of distributed generation, and conservation to reduce the need for new transmission capacity.
- The coalition is unified in opposition to eminent domain.

An excerpt from the letter addresses the last of the seven points:

"The PSC has not to-date – either in its Energy Highway Blueprint or in any public setting – articulated a convincing need for the new transmission capacity based on the most current data about electricity supply and demand. The potential for energy conservation, demand-side management, local green power generation and distributed generation to reduce the need for new transmission lines has not been examined."

Kline confirmed the letter has been sent to Cuomo, Assemblyman Steve Englebright, Assemblywoman Amy Paulin, Assemblywoman Didi Barrett, Chair of Public Service Commission Audrey Zibelman, President and CEO of New York Power Authority Gil Quiniones, State Sen. David Carlucci, State Sen. George D. Maziarz, State Sen. Terry Gipson and Thomas Congdon, deputy secretary for energy.

The town of Claverack passed its resolution in opposition to the expansion in December, but as of its regularly scheduled monthly meeting in January it had not yet been sent.

Kline said one of the reasons for the coalition was to make sure these letters are sent to officials in order to have residents' voices heard.

Kline said now that they can apply for intervenor funds on a larger scale, the coalition has found a transmission line specialist from the University of Southern California who specializes in expansion like the one New York is facing, and hopes to hire him.

Solomon said he has been focusing his energies on the power line community meeting. The meeting is scheduled to be conducted 11 a.m. Saturday at the Churchtown Firehouse, 2219 Route 27, Claverack.