

ATC representative defends line in Warrens

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Ten people explained why they don't want a 345-kilovolt transmission line proposed by the American Transmission Company and Xcel Energy at a Public Service Commission meeting Thursday in Warrens.

Dozens of people attended the hearing held at Three Bears Lodge. Those who spoke voiced many of the same concerns that already have been heard and put on record at previous hearings in Holmen and Cashton.

The concerns include health risks associated with high-voltage lines, environmental impacts, no-wire alternatives, loss of home, livelihood and adverse impacts on local communities.

But Anne Spalholz, manager of corporate communication with ATC, said the high-voltage line will help improve electric system reliability both locally and regionally, relieve congestion on the transmission grid, move renewable resources into the area and create a more economical delivery of electricity.

Spalholz said ATC's transmission-planning engineers have conducted thousands of studies on the system each year looking for where weaknesses exist on the grid and concluded that adding high-voltage electric line will help solve the problem.

"We have been studying this particular area for a number of years, and this is the solution to those issues that we have come up with," Spalholz said.

However, opponents say there is no need or desire for the line, estimated to cost \$540 to \$580 million, depending on which of the two proposed routes is chosen. They contend there are alternatives, such as energy efficiency and green initiatives with fewer health and environmental impacts.

Two routes have been proposed between Holmen and Madison. The northern route runs through Black River Falls and Warrens; the southern route along I-90 cuts south to Cashton and then turns east and follows the Monroe-Vernon county line.

Thomas Forrer, who lives on a farm between Ettrick and Blair, opposes the northern route. He said Trempealeau County already has been negatively impacted by sand mining and hosting the CapX2020 line.

"We do not need, we do not want this power line, and I see absolutely no reason, if it has to be, why it has to be up here," Forrer said.

Spaltholz said that the northern route, while longer, uses 90 percent of existing utility corridors and federal state highway corridor. The southern route, while shorter, only uses 60 percent. The route that will be used is the commission's decision.

"(PSC commissioners) have two choices to make," Spaltholz said. "The first one is do they agree with our assessment of the need for the project. If they agree there's a need for the project, then they'll select the route, and they may choose the northern route, the southern route or some variation of that.

"If they don't agree with the need for the project, then that's the end of the project."

Even with the two route options, Joe Kravetsky, owner of Oakdale KOA, is still against the line because he believes a transmission line would destroy his business. He told the commission the line would run right through his campground.

"This line as it is proposed today would destroy our business," Kravetsky said. "We are in the hospitality business ... I mean we will go under by the end of the year that it starts."

He said one of the towers would stand where the pool is, and the power lines would go right over the top of their house.

Kravetsky said he would fight against the line whether or not it went through his property.

"I'm a 30-year electrical engineer; I understand the impacts, and no studies have been done whatsoever," Kravetsky said. "This isn't the solution to our electric problems long term or short term. There's many, many things that need to or should be done first."

Debra Severson agrees that the commission needs to look at many of the risks that were overlooked when the Badger-Coulee line was initially proposed.

"The environmental impact statement totally ignored research on the cumulative risks of (electromotive force) and didn't touch at all the risks of corona ... The commission's decision must take into account the recent EMF and corona research, and then it has to take a look at the cumulative risks associated with time, voltage and distance," Severson said.

She said corona ionizing particles attract pollutants that more readily stay in the lungs and interrupt the body's production of melatonin. EMF has been linked to interrupting the migratory patterns of avian and mammal species.

"The commission should be serving public interest and comparing health and environmental risks of Badger-Coulee to the no-wires alternatives," Severson said.

The final decision of the commission is expected to be issued in April 2015. Written comments can be submitted through Jan. 5, 2015.