

Neighbors United continues to fight Ameren

by **Ashley Hoak** KTVO

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KIRKSVILLE, MO. -- Neighbors United is the locally formed grassroots organization that is opposing Ameren's Mark Twain Transmission Project.

When the group first formed in mid-August, fewer than 20 people were in attendance at meetings to learn more about the proposed high-voltage transmission line.

Since then, the group has grown to about 200 dissatisfied landowners who will be impacted by the project in Adair, Schuyler, Knox and Shelby counties.

"There is a group of us who have come together, just everyday citizens and we call ourselves Neighbors United," said Beth Campbell, a group spokeswoman. "We are here to help some other folks who are being affected by the transmission line to give them alternate information than what Ameren is passing out."

As well as holding their own meetings and speaking at different events to help inform community members about the impact from Ameren, they've also attended the open houses hosted by the company. At those open houses, Neighbors United members made it clear that they oppose the project by holding protest signs and speaking with officials, in some cases, even being escorted out after Neighbors United members did not like the information Ameren was giving to the community.

"I feel like it's so important that people know that it's ok to say 'no,'" said Teri Page of Neighbors United. "Sure, they can try and use eminent domain in the end, but if we stand united and stand up for our rights as landowners, then I believe we are more powerful when we are united."

The biggest fear that these landowners have is Ameren's threat to use eminent domain as a last resort to build the 100-mile-long power line from Palmyra to Kirksville.

"We are also interested in issues around eminent domain, and so far Ameren does not have eminent domain," Campbell said. "Luckily, in three counties, the county commissioners have come out against Ameren, and there is a Missouri statute that no power company can't put a line across a public road without the specific permission of the county commissioners."

Ameren Transmission Representative Leigh Morris told KTVO that he has never seen a group as organized and successful in rallying the community against a power line.

"There are some other groups that have worked in the past to stop power line projects similar to this by just banding together, knowing their rights, talking to the lawyers," Campbell said.

In October, a Missouri judge ruled against a subsidiary of Ameren in a legal dispute over whether it needs state permission to build the high-voltage power line. Ameren had wanted a court to declare that it doesn't need a certificate from the Missouri Public Service Commission to construct the power line or to use eminent domain to acquire property in its path.

Neighbors United members are hoping that before Ameren makes its decision about a finalized route, more concerned citizens will join their fight.

"I believe it's important we connect with other people who might actually not know that we exist," Page added.