

## New, giant power-line towers will soon dot northern New Jersey

By Mark DiIunno

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Matt Rainey/The Star-Ledger Scott Olson (left), **Elliot Ruga (right)** and Lisa Chammings (center) stand on Lisa Chammings' Stillwater farm Wednesday. In the background is a line of power towers which were erected in 1929. PSE&G is proposing an upgrade to the lines which would require replacing the towers with new ones, more than doubling the height of the towers. The cellular telephone tower in the background stands 120 feet tall. The power line tower stands 80 feet tall. The proposed power line towers will stand approx 190 ft. tall.

In the northwest corner of the state, where national and state parks converge to form 110,000 acres of natural lands, the High Point Monument, at 220 feet, is the lone structure looming above the tree line.

That may soon change. Power-line towers as high as 195 feet are soon going to soar over treetops in places like the Delaware Water Gap national park, the Appalachian Trail, and the ridges of the Kittatinnyys.

But you won't have to be on a nature excursion to see these monuments to electricity. They'll be coming to neighborhoods in 16 towns from Sussex to Essex counties; places like Sparta and Jefferson and Montville and Parsippany and East Hanover, where old power lines created health concerns among the residents.

And more may be coming. There are preliminary studies to have the monster towers built in Somerset and Union counties, from Branchburg to Roseland, and climb the Watchungs over to Jersey City.

The march brings to mind the images from Orson Welles' "War of the Worlds" broadcast, except this invasion isn't drawing nearly the attention, let alone hysteria.

Despite numerous public hearings and incremental government approvals, the pending construction is news to most people. But once these towers go up, they'll be impossible to ignore. In many towns they will be the tallest structures — higher than water spheres and cell towers, with the wing span of a Martian vulture.

"These towers will be an aesthetic nightmare," East Hanover Mayor Joseph Pannullo said. "I don't know why people aren't outraged over this. I know this: After they go up, plenty of people will say, 'How did this happen?'"

Last month the state Board of Public Utilities approved PSE&G's plan to replace 240 squat power-line stanchions with the new towers, which will be more than twice as high and carry more than three times the voltage. Some cities don't have buildings that high.

PSE&G calls it the Susquehanna-Roseland Project, and new towers will be 165 to 195 feet tall, replacing towers that stand 65 to 80 feet. They will carry 500 kilovolt lines and the current 230 kilovolt lines, doubling the amount of strands from pole to pole.

"Since the existing line was put into service in the early 1930s, electricity usage in New Jersey has increased by more than 2,000 percent," said PSE&G spokeswoman Karen Johnson. "The project is needed for reliability." Three separate analyses, she said, have determined that 23 transmission circuits in North Jersey and eastern Pennsylvania will be overloaded "as early as 2012, resulting in possible brownouts and blackouts."

For 46 miles, from the Delaware west of Millbrook Village down to the big transfer station in Roseland, the towers will be placed about 1,200 feet apart, nearly the length of four football fields. The tallest, at Lake Denmark, will be 240 feet high. From the air, the new towers will look like a giant zipper over hill and dale of the Highlands. On the ground, they will dwarf the tallest oaks not only in height but in the shoulders.

"I don't think people fully understand how big these towers will be, and how many there will be, and how scenic vistas (of the Highlands) will be impacted by this," said Lisa Chamming, a Stillwater farmer who has two old stanchions on her property. One is on a nearly bare hilltop, one is in valley.

On the ridge to the east, the old stanchions march in straight lines up the hillside like an army of steel soldiers, stealthily below the tree lines. "The new towers will be twice as high as those trees," she said, pointing to the ridge.

About 75 of the new towers will be in the Highlands. The National Park Service is currently reviewing PSE&G's application for towers within the recreation area, but the state Highlands Council approved it last year, after PSE&G paid a \$18.6 million mitigation fee. The money will be used for other preservation programs in the region.

## DISTURBANCES

The lines will carry electricity from coal-fired generation plants of Pennsylvania and the Midwest to the metro area. Johnson said the utility is overdue for an upgrade to "address reliability standards" set by the federal government. "Right now we are in violation of these standards," she said.

Critics say those high-use times are extremely rare — only the few very hottest days in summer — and the new lines will be overkill.

"The data PSE&G provided said there are something like 10 hours a year where the grid might go down," said Kevin Duffy, the mayor of Hardwick, who opposes the line.

Deborah Pasquarelli of Greenwich Township, another opponent, was one of two Highlands Council members who voted against the plan.

"There is no way any reasonable, sane person could look at the PSE&G plan and say it was consistent with the Highlands Act," she said. "The Highlands Act, simply put, limits land disturbance so groundwater can be recharged. The land disturbance with PSE&G's project will be enormous, to say the least."

The major land disturbance will come during construction of the towers.

First, the parts must be trucked in. Since a 195-foot tower is equivalent to a 16-story building, large cranes will be needed to assemble and stand them. Each tower must be sunk 40 feet into the ground for stability, so excavators and other dirt-movers will do the digging.

A Highlands Council report said access roads to the line include dirt paths and old logging roads, and "wind through the forest, across boulder fields, and over fallen tree trunks, and transcend up slopes and down gradients."

Those roads will have to be widened and improved in a number of parks, preserves and other environmentally sensitive areas, beginning with the Water Gap. The line also goes through Kittatinny Valley State Park in Andover, Wildcat Ridge in Rockaway Township, Buck Mountain near Smoke Rise in Kinnelon, and Pyramid Mountain in Montville.

It will either skirt or go over lakes Aeroflex, Mohawk, Hopatcong and Denmark, the Split Rock Reservoir, and the Passaic River wetlands of Troy Meadows in Parsippany and Hatfield Swamp in East Hanover.

**"They are going to disrupt a lot of landscape to improve these access roads," said Elliott Ruga, from the preservation group the Highlands Coalition,**

In East Hanover there is even a greater concern.

"It's one thing to protect the environment, it's another to protect people," Pannullo said. "I've talked to our congressmen and all the state officials. People have a way of being polite but doing nothing to help you. PSE&G is very powerful in this state, and big givers" to political campaigns.

The line runs within 200 feet of about 120 homes in East Hanover. For half of those, the lines are essentially in backyards.

"We've had seven cancers on this block," said Edie Loehwing, who has a tower in her backyard, practically straddling a storage shed. Her husband, Rich, a retired deputy police chief, had a brain tumor. Her backyard neighbor's son had brain cancer as boy. A woman down the street died young of breast cancer.

A half-mile away, Ethel Pierson, who lives 100 feet from the line, said she had four cancers in her family. Two of her daughters survived cancer as young adults. Her granddaughter, who lived with Pierson, survived a blood cancer. Her husband died of lung cancer.

Three doors down, a woman has leukemia; another neighbor has colon cancer. A man down the street had a brain tumor removed.

"When I saw they wanted to put in bigger lines, I went door to door, every chance I got, to say, 'We've got to fight this.'" Pierson said.

The health risks of electromagnetic fields are a controversial issue.

"The question of EMF and cancer had been raised by several different studies, and has therefore been studied in depth for over 30 years," said Linda Erdreich, epidemiologist and EMF researcher. "Based on the considerable evidence in the thousands of studies to date, reputable scientific agencies have not concluded that EMF is a cause of any type of cancer."

Pannullo said of power lines: "I've read 25 reports saying they are safe, and 25 saying they kill people. But that's a lot of cancer in one neighborhood. If that's a coincidence, it's a hell of a coincidence."

The new towers on the Highlands line may be just the first phase for PSE&G. The utility is studying the need for 500-kilovolt towers from Branchburg in Somerset County to Roseland, and then from Roseland to Jersey City.

"If they get this one through, you know that one's coming," Pannullo said.

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