

Protesters: PSE&G power line upgrade unnecessary

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Written by Abbott Koloff | Staff Writer

EAST HANOVER — Township Mayor Joe Pannullo and a group of local officials and environmental activists protested against the proposed Susquehanna-Roseland power line Thursday afternoon, responding to a recent federal government announcement that the project has been placed on a high-priority list.

More than 50 people showed up for the protest at Lurker Park, some holding up signs alleging the \$1.2 billion power line was not needed and would bring dirty coal-fueled electricity from Pennsylvania. The line would originate in Pennsylvania and be built along an existing power line traversing 16 New Jersey towns, including seven in Morris County, doubling the height of some of the utility towers to close to 200 feet.

“If they bring the line here, I’m going to tie myself to one of those poles and they’re going to take me away to jail,” Pannullo said.

Officials with PSE&G, which would build the New Jersey component of the power line, say it’s needed to increase the amount of power available to state residents and businesses and make power outages less likely. They also say coal is not the primary fuel to be used in power sources connected to the grid, that natural gas represents the majority, with wind and nuclear power also included.

The power line has been placed on a so-called fast-track as part of a federal program to modernize the nation’s electric grid. It has been on hold while the National Park Service has been conducting an environmental impact study because the line passes through the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, the Middle Delaware National Scenic and the Appalachian National Scenic Trail. The review is expected to be completed next fall.

Abigail Dillen, an attorney with an environmental group called Earthjustice, said on Thursday that her group filed a brief with the state Superior Court appellate division Thursday to support a motion asking judges to order the state Board of Public Utilities to hold another hearing on the project. The BPU had approved the line last year.

The brief alleges “new factual developments” and says the organization that coordinates the regional electric grid in 13 states, PJM Interconnection, recently reported a drop in reliability issues on the network, which would make the new power line less of an imperative.

PSE&G spokeswoman Karen Johnson said PJM, of which PSE&G is a member, has not changed its position about the need for the power line.

“PJM would make a change in the project, and they have not done that,” she said.

Protesters on Tuesday said they feared fast-tracking the project means it will be built without an environmental impact review.

“All of a sudden, the environmental review will be ignored or shelved,” said Elliott Ruga, an analyst with the New Jersey Highlands Coalition.

Johnson said fast-tracking won’t scuttle the impact study but that the Parks Service might not be allowed to go past next fall to release it. “We’re hopeful this keeps us on the current schedule,” she said.

PSE&G officials say the New Jersey portion of the line covers 45 miles and would cost \$750 million to build. In Morris County, it would go through parts of Boonton Township, East Hanover, Jefferson, Kinnelon, Montville, Parsippany and Rockaway.

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