



Henry Soleski (above) addressed the State Corporation Commission as an expert witness for Save the Rappahannock Coalition.

Save the Rappahannock Coalition and Dominion Virginia Power present additional arguments to SCC regarding tower application

by Audrey Thomasson

RICHMOND—The Rappahannock River is "...the fifth most threatened river of American rivers," said Martha Little, Virginia Outdoor Foundation's deputy director of stewardship.

In yet another series of State Corporation Commission hearings over the past 18 months regarding Dominion Power's application to erect towers across the Rappahannock River, Little was one of the first to testify last week during the public comments section at the SCC courtrooms in Richmond.

She noted that both the state and federal government had enormous resources invested in protecting the river and that her board has "concerns about large utilities on protected resources... and Dominion's lack of credibility with the public."

A landscaper for many of Virginia's most scenic parks and historic sites, including Lewis Ginter Botanical Gardens, Monticello and Jamestown, Ralph Higgins spoke of the scenic and economic value the crossing has to Virginia tourism.

"It's one of the most attractive settings on the East Coast," said Higgins.

"It's a historic waterway that escaped the industrial development of the other waterways."

Middlesex supervisor Peter Mansfield said "an underground cable is important to the economic future" of both Middlesex and Lancaster in offering recreational opportunities to visitors and residents. He noted that tower fenders would be a hazard to boaters.

The SCC hearings started up again on April 18, lasting five days under the direction of hearing examiner Alexander F. Skirpan Jr.

The additional hearings were ordered by Skirpan after a July 2016 SCC session. He ordered Dominion to examine alternatives to the tower plan, including attaching insulated cables to the bridge and burying cables in a trench, and their associated costs.

Dominion engineers Wes Keck and Dennis Kaminski submitted supplemental information and revisions to their July 2016 testimony which was not presented orally in court. Under cross examination concerning load and weight factors for the bridge option, they referred most questions to the

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expert witnesses.

Two representatives of Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), district engineer Marcie Parker and bridge engineer Annette Adams, testified Monday that the weight of a bridge attachment would result in weight restrictions on the bridge as well as \$25- to \$35-million in additional structural support costs.

Adams has continued to maintain that VDOT has no structural improvements coming up for the bridge for the next 10 to 15 years.

Testifying for respondents William Barnhardt, Lancaster County, and the Save the Rappahannock Coalition, Michael Matthews of Williamsburg-

based The Structures Group said he presented a plan to VDOT that included additional supports that would not require weight restrictions.

Debate continued over the cost of trenching underwater cables, which Dominion previously estimated at some \$92.3 million.

Henry Soleski of Connecticut was presented as a witness whose 30 years of experience with underwater cables for power companies across the nation far exceeds the experience of Dominion's trenching expert, who has done only one trenching project, according to Barnhardt's attorney Michael York.

Soleski showed four underwater options that could be installed for costs ranging from \$13 mil-

lion to \$24 million, compared to Dominion's projected \$26.2 million cost for 10 new towers with fenders.

John Pirko, an attorney for Old Dominion Electric Co-op, which buys power from Dominion, suggested additional costs should be absorbed by the affected local counties and not passed on to other Dominion Power customers, a suggestion that has been rejected by the SCC in the past.

Skirpan set a deadline of 30 days for filing post-hearing briefs following completion of hearing transcripts in two to three weeks. While a decision may come in the fall, the case could continue to the Supreme Court of Virginia.