

White Stone council to consider 'no towers' resolution at June meeting

WHITE STONE—The Robert O. Norris Jr. Memorial Bridge across the Rappahannock River in White Stone is the front door to Lancaster County. Let's make it inviting.

That was the message Roy Carter, Carl Smith and a handful of others delivered to the White Stone Town Council last Thursday, when members of the Save the Rappahannock Coalition urged council to join other towns and counties in a unified front against Dominion Virginia Power's proposal to place transmission towers alongside the bridge.

"These towers are the first thing people will see," said Carter. "This ugly sight," will be a first impression.

Carter noted he came before the council in March, asking them to join the Lancaster and Middlesex boards of supervisors and the Kilmarnock, Irvington and Urbanna town councils in passing a resolution to ask Dominion to bury the lines. Carter said the town has not responded to his request.

"Join us, join the other towns, join the thousands of other people, join the business partners, to consider bringing resolutions to the table," he said.

Dominion has an application pending before the Virginia State Corporation Commission (SCC) for approval of a project to replace the 2.2 miles of power line that crosses the river. The proposal includes running line on towers placed 85-feet east of the bridge, according to James Beazley with Dominion Virginia Power.

The project has met with private, public and government criticism over the past several months. The Save the Rappahannock Coalition has urged the SCC and Dominion to bury the lines.

The 35 people attending last Thursday's meeting in White Stone urged council to join in the fight.

White Stone is about to embark on several rehabilitation and renovation projects which would help to beautify the town and increase commercial activity.

Business owner Ammon G. Dunton Jr. commended the council and planning commission for thinking long term about growth and beauty and the future of White Stone. However, he said, "not joining in with your neighbors is very shortsighted."

"Think about the people that elected you. They didn't ask you to think about the short-term benefits, but to think about the long term."

Although the construction of the towers would undoubtedly bring business to White Stone in the short term, the unsightly towers would be detrimental to future growth, he said.

Lancaster District 3 supervisor Jason Bellows also urged the council to join the fight, pointing out the bridge is a landmark and that "what Dominion has proposed is vastly different from [the towers already] there."

In response, councilman Blair Kenyon made a motion to draft a resolution regarding the towers for consideration at the June 2 meeting. Joe Sliakis offered a second and the motion passed 5-0 with one abstention. Voting in favor were Kenyon, Sliakis, Irving Brittingham, Kelli Blankenship and Paul Elbourn. Jennifer Hodges abstained. William Hubbard was absent.

Sliakis asked Save the Rappahannock president Carl Smith whether he thought Dominion "has a vendetta against Lancaster County? Why do you think they are doing this with all this opposition?"

Sliakis pointed out the power company is the the expert in the matter and has probably come up with the best and

most affordable solution. He also asked Smith if the SCC is the final decision maker on the project and if that is the organization the council and others should address. Smith said yes, ultimately the decision about the project lies with the SCC.

Brittingham reminded the audience the bridge is 60 years old and "it is an eyesore. I know people that don't know what's alongside it because they go across it with their eyes closed."

Brittingham referenced the recent work and expected additional work to repair potholes on the bridge, saying the community needs to support the construction of a new bridge and the town council needs to pass a resolution requesting that from the Virginia Department of Transportation.

Mayor Randy Reeves told Brittingham he and town manager Patrick Frere were planning to attend a VDOT meeting in Spotsylvania County this week and would voice their concern about the bridge. Reeves also said he had been in touch with county, state and federal representatives.