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Resolution opposing power line project stumbles in Northumberland, Kilmarnock

by Renss Greene

KILMARNOCK—A resolution opposing a Dominion Virginia Power plan to erect 10 steel towers to carry transmission lines across the Rappahannock River parallel to the Robert O. Norris Jr. Memorial Bridge hit a stumbling block this past week.

The Northumberland board of supervisors and Kilmarnock town council both held off on the resolution until they can study the issue further.

Lancaster board of supervisors chairman Jason Bellows on August 17 urged town council to pass the resolution, which supports replacing the aging lines, first activated in 1962, but asks they be put underwater rather than on towers. Lancaster, Middlesex and Irvington have all passed the resolution.

"If we allow the proposal that's currently before us, it will change the character of our entry to our county, and it should be appalling to everyone," Bellows said, pointing out that there are underwater lines across the Piankatank and York rivers, adding, "If you put that on that bridge, that's all you're going to see, is 180-foot blinking industrial towers with wires."

"Perspective is perspective," said Gregory Mathe, communications manager for the project, in an interview with the Record August 14. "We can understand people having a point of view on infrastructure. Some people notice it, some people don't."

"We do all we can to make it blend in with the scenery," added Dominion spokesperson Daisy Pridden.

Bellows also said the tower project has been "completely untransparent."

Mathe said Dominion contacted property owners and county governments on both sides of the river, although Bellows said that contact was not informative.

"It only became on the radar of us locally when they presented it to the board of supervisors in May, with scant details and not a single image," Bellows said.

Northumberland county administrator Kenny Eades at first put the resolution in the board of supervisor's packet for its August 13 meeting, but removed the resolution before the meeting.

"It may come up next month," Eades said. "I felt like you needed to hear both sides before you decided on this. There are some comments both ways."

In the town council meeting, member Emerson Gravatt said he wanted to hold off deciding on the resolution until after he has more information.

"I can't pass a resolution until I get more information, and I'm hoping Jason will get that at his (August) 25th meeting with Virginia Power," Gravatt said.

According to Dominion applications, the 10 towers will be higher than the bridge and stand some 100 feet



This rendering, furnished by Dominion Virginia Power, shows a simulated view of the new towers and transmission lines parallel to the Robert O. Norris Jr. Memorial Bridge. The red indicator (inset) shows the perspective for the larger image.

downstream. The application has earned Virginia Marine Resources Commission approval and is awaiting approval from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Meanwhile, activists opposed to the project have set up a website, notowers.org, and Bellows has invited Sen. Ryan McDougal, Del. Margarate Ransone, Del. Keith Hodges, and Dominion representatives to a meeting August 25.

Bellows said Dominion representatives have agreed to meet, but government representatives may be unavailable.