

Irvington authorizes use of the Commons for anti- tower rally

by Audrey Thomasson

IRVINGTON—Public opinion continues to heat up over Dominion Power's proposal to erect towers across the Rappahannock River. The towers would carry transmission lines to replace those that are now attached to the Robert O. Norris Jr. Memorial Bridge.

Hilda Page asked the Irvington Town Council for permission to hold a rally on the commons to inform residents of Dominion Power's plans and to gather support for an alternative plan to run the lines under water.

According to Page, Dominion spent \$85 million to run 3.5 miles of cable under the York River, after predicting the cost would be \$235 million.

Based on the actual costs of the York River project, "The Rappahannock project, which is just 2.4 miles wide, should cost between \$60 to \$65 million," she said. The cost of the towers is estimated at \$30 million. "It is not three to five times more expensive, as Dominion Power is reporting.

"Preserving the Rappahannock River will require vigorously opposing their tower plan," she said.

Council unanimously approved giving the "No Towers.org" organization use of the commons for the rally.

The event will take place from noon to 4 p.m. October 31 and is family-oriented. Organizers will provide food, non-alcoholic beverages and music.

The Irvington Halloween event for kids will follow at about 5:30 p.m.

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Inside News

Middlesex supervisor indicates power line tower plan should have had SCC approval

by *Larry Chowning*

SALUDA—Representatives from Dominion Virginia Power answered questions from Middlesex County Supervisor Pete Mansfield on September 1 with regards to replacing the aging power line infrastructure that has been in place since 1962 on the Robert O. Norris Bridge. The 2.1-mile-long bridge across the Rappahannock River connects Middlesex and Lancaster counties.

The Dominion plan calls for the power lines across the Rappahannock to be upgraded and placed on 11 new 120-190 foot high steel structures with concrete foundations in the water.

Mansfield asked why the new power lines could not be mounted to the bridge as the current lines are.

Dominion official Wes Keck said the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) has not encouraged attachment of the new lines to the bridge because of the bridge's "age and condition." He noted that "standards" for mounting lines have changed since the present lines were mounted in 1962. "It's very prohibitive now because of the standards now required for new

construction," he said.

Keck said if the power lines were mounted to the bridge, the increased weight of the higher voltage lines would require building a "pull box" on the bridge, and the physical configuration of the bridge does not lend itself to such an undertaking.

Mansfield asked, "This is going to cost you \$25 million to build the towers and run the electric lines. Why don't you donate \$25 million toward a new bridge and ask VDOT to allow you to place your lines on it?"

Keck responded, "That's above my authority."

He also noted that in "numerous conversations" with VDOT, Dominion officials have been told VDOT has no immediate plans to replace the bridge, which was built in 1957.

Mansfield also voiced concern that Dominion Power used a technicality to avoid having to present its proposed power line plan to the State Corporation Commission (SCC).

Dominion only had to get permits from Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC) and the Army Corps of Engineers to build the power line towers.

The towers across the Rappah-

annock will carry a 115 KV line but the capacity of the towers will hold a 200 plus KV line. Mansfield said if Dominion had requested a "full capacity" in the number of volts, the company would have been required to go before the SCC for additional approval. Mansfield suggested this may have been a maneuver by Dominion to avoid going before the SCC.

"This somewhat negates the spirit of the General Assembly because if you go back now and request to install full capacity voltage lines, and you already have the tower capacity, who will turn you down?" said Mansfield.

Keck said all indications are that the time is "way, way in the future" when residential and commercial business growth will warrant full capacity lines on the Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula.

The tower power lines issue has heated up over the past few weeks. The Lancaster County Board of Supervisors has filed an appeal of the Virginia Marine Resources Commission decision approving Dominion's plan to build the new towers. As of September 15, no response has been filed and a hearing date has not been set.