

Community Forum

YOUR LETTERS

Straight talk from Dominion said missing

I am pleased to respond to Dominion Power's Dan Weekly.

Mr. Weekly says Dominion "began working with local governments starting in 2014" but in fact I, as chairman of the Lancaster Board of Supervisors (BOS), was not briefed until May 2015.

This sort of lawyerly deception has been a consistent pattern for Dominion on this project. For example, Dominion claims to have "fully disclosed project details as early as September 2014." In fact, there were no "project details" to disclose in September 2014. By Dominion's own admission, the project was still under development when they briefed the Lancaster Board of Supervisors on May 28. Few details were offered at that meeting, and not a single pictorial depiction of the project was presented nor was there any mention of the public's Baylor oyster grounds having to be vacated.

Mr. Weekly goes on to say that with no concerns raised by local governments, Dominion "successfully obtained the necessary permits needed to rebuild the overhead line." Not true, objections were raised. The Lancaster Board of Supervisors voted unanimously on June 25

in opposition to the overhead proposal—a full month before Dominion appeared before the Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC) on July 28.

Dominion has done a masterful job of "hiding the football" as they raced to the goal line to obtain their permits. For this they may be admired, even by those who oppose them. But for straight talk, they have come up short.

Mr. Weekly says: "We [Dominion] value community engagement and are very open to suggestions." I must say, with all due respect, that has not been evident to many of us in the Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula.

I reaffirm my commitment to work with Mr. Weekly and all involved parties to come up with a mutually acceptable solution.

**Jason Bellows,
White Stone**

Due process denied

The right to due process under law is guaranteed by the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments. The citizens of the Northern Neck and the Middle Peninsula who live near the Rappahannock's Norris Bridge have been denied due process.

Dominion Power plans to move power lines now attached to the side of the bridge onto metal towers that will be higher than the bridge. The industrial appearance of the towers and attached cables will degrade the natural beauty of the area.

County governments and the public only recently learned of the project, after approval for the towers was obtained from Virginia Marine Resources and the Army Corps of Engineers. These agencies are not charged with taking into consideration the visual changes or economic effect of the towers. This is left to the State Corporation Commission, but only when the proposed transmission line is designed to carry 138 Kv or more. Dominion states that its line will carry 115 Kv. Therefore no agency is charged with the responsibility to hear public input about the towers. Citizens are silenced!

All Virginians should be concerned about this denial of due process and the negative impact of unsightly towers on Rivah residents, tourists, and boaters.

**Len Engstrom,
White Stone**

Stop this ugly idea

Please help stop this ugly idea that Dominion Power has for our beautiful area.

The crossing of the bridge is the highlight of the trip when going from the Middle Peninsula to the Northern Neck; looking upriver and downriver to check the river conditions and see what boats are traveling below. It's fun, exciting and always rewarding, no matter what the weather conditions.

But now one will only see these ugly towers! For what? To save a few bucks! Dominion, shame on you for destroying our visual environment for the sake of your shareholders.

**Richard Rosanelli,
Hardyville**

Consider this

Transporting people and their products across the Rappahannock River has concerned the residents of the Northern Neck since Colonial days, as now with cities and counties seeking to brand themselves as quiet, out-of-the-way destinations for weekends and vacations.

As a result, the broad Rappahannock estuary has been noted as the natural jewel it is.

About a century ago, steamboats carried residents of the Northern Neck along the Rappahannock and Chesapeake Bay to Baltimore. As farmers needed transportation for their products, the Robert Opie Norris Bridge went into service, spanning the Rappahannock with the promise of safe, convenient transportation for at least 50 years. Now 60 years later, with no cogent plan on paper to replace it, we know that farmers and a growing number of individuals and businesses avoid driving across a bridge they see as having outlived its usefulness.

The rusting old standby is festooned with a tangled array of electrical conductors partially suspended on a messy graveyard of towers owned by Dominion Power, the energy conglomerate who wish to add another string of towers. The battle between the people and the conglomerate is on.

There's another way to proceed in providing power, hastening the improvement of traffic flow and restoring a view of

the bay. It would undoubtedly require patience and a cooperative spirit among industry, governments and their customer-citizens, but I think it could work in three steps.

First: Dominion Power would start by laying cables underneath the Rappahannock with capacity say 150% of what its towers now carry.

Second: About the towers. Forget the towers. Take down the old ones. That would be a good start in restoring the estuary to the less impeded look of an earlier time.

Third: Set Virginia's planners to work on a replacement for the Norris bridge as soon as possible.

**E.R. Kallus,
Merry Point**

Morality vs Legality?

In response to Daniel Weekly's letter last week: The team at Dominion has done a remarkable job of obtaining permissions to build their towers, in such a way that everyone on the Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula was oblivious of "The Plan" from Dominion.

Our community consists of caring custodians of one of the most beautiful areas around the Chesapeake, and we have some of the best brains' around. How did we all completely miss any communication, presentation and warning of this blight? Could it be because the absolute minimum necessary to get these apparent permissions occurred?

When dealing with areas of outstanding natural beauty, there is a moral requirement to go the extra mile; a moral duty to explore every avenue, to minimize any effect on the landscape; a moral responsibility to the custodians of the area, to ensure they are involved in any decision to despoil the beauty of this unique landscape.

When an apparent miscarriage of justice is occurring, we should call for a moratorium, to re-explore every possible alternative. I have heard ideas, from sharing in the cost of a new bridge, adding lines to the existing bridge, putting cables underwater, etc.

The biggest question, however, is the cry of how expensive it is to place cables underwater and how it is unfair to burden the rest of Virginia with the cost. My response is we have shared the cost of doing this under the Piank-tank River, the Elizabeth River, the York, and many other rivers. Are we just the benefactors to all these other communities, not worthy of retaining our views?

Mr. Weekly, to use your own words, it is not the "eve of construction," it is the dawning of your perceived permission!

**Gordon Slatford,
Irvington**

YOUR LETTERS

Dominion should value its reputation

On behalf of our membership, I have written to Dominion Power to express in the strongest possible terms our opposition to the towers they propose to build across the Rappahannock River.

Our area prides itself on its natural beauty, and central to that are our waterways, including the Rappahannock and the Chesapeake Bay. To damage that beauty in such a conscious and permanent manner would be a travesty, especially when reasonable alternatives exist.

In our opinion, suggesting this course of action, and attempting to slide it through in what looks like an underhanded manner, has already badly damaged Dominion Power's reputation in this part of Virginia. This issue is far from over. People here are outraged and primed for a fight. To help in this effort we are contributing \$500 to NoTowers.org.

It's not too late to change course. We would suggest that a true analysis, not one based solely on accounting, would place an economic and cultural value on the beauty of our river as it enters the bay, thus offsetting the additional cost that we are told would be associated with

underground cable.

Please, Dominion Power, reconsider, and remember that corporate reputation is as fragile as natural beauty.

**Dermot McNulty, president
Irvington Village
Improvement Association**

Dominion has a blind spot

In his letter last week in the Record, Daniel Weekly, vice president of corporate affairs for Dominion Virginia Power, made several assertions regarding the proposed overhead transmission towers on the Rappahannock River adjacent to the Norris Bridge. The Save the Rappahannock Coalition (SRC) is pleased to offer the following responses.

Mr. Weekly: "Safety, reliability, environmental impact, and cost are among important considerations at Dominion Virginia Power as we work to meet our customers' energy needs."

SRC response: On safety and reliability, we put our trust in Dominion. But on environmental impact, the truth is that no environmental impact study was performed for this project. In fact, the disturbance to the river bottom resulting from the installation of ten large concrete bases will be significant. The alternative installation, running the cables under the riverbed as was done at the

York River, would result in no disturbance whatsoever to marine life or the riverbed.

On the issue of cost, Dominion performed no analysis of the alternatives, hence no meaningful cost comparisons. Nor was an economic impact study performed to assess the adverse effect of the unsightly towers on the economies of the Middle Peninsula and the Northern Neck. That is a cost to all of us who live and work in the region—a cost Dominion chooses to ignore.

But the most disturbing aspect of Mr. Weekly's letter is what he left out—any mention of the impact these industrial style towers would have on the irreplaceable beauty of the Rappahannock River. It is here that Dominion has a blind spot. Sadly, this natural beauty which draws some to live here, some to visit, and some to build businesses here does not even warrant mentioning on Mr. Weekly's list of Dominion's "important considerations." What a shame.

**Carl Smith, President,
Save the Rappahannock
Coalition, White Stone**