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Citizens concerned over power lines fill venue in Cambridge

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Associate Editor

CAMBRIDGE, Md. — The auditorium at Cambridge South Dorchester High School was filled to capacity on Feb. 3 with citizens concerned about the Mid-Atlantic Power Pathway (MAPP).

The route MAPP is proposed to follow will be 230 miles long (with 27 of those miles going through Dorchester County), beginning at the edge of the Potomac River in northern Virginia, going through Southern Maryland, stretching across the Chesapeake Bay, traveling up through the Delmarva Peninsula and ending in southern New Jersey.

Bill Gausman, senior vice president for asset management for Pepco, the company in charge of MAPP, said the project is needed to deliver power throughout the entire region.

“We’ve used up capacity within the existing lines,” he said. “Growth (in the area) within the last 10 to 15 years has been significant.”

Gausman said there have been no final decisions made on the project, and there is still an extensive permit process Pepco must go through, as well as comprehensive environmental studies that must be conducted to determine the effect of MAPP.

“All this work has yet to be done,” he said. Gausman said Pepco has heard numerous concerns about the project, including route selection, the appearance of transmission towers (perceived as unattractive), fragmentation forest and agricultural lands, health issues, property values and impact on agricultural uses.

“We believe we’ll be able to satisfy all landowners,” he said. “That is our goal — not to have any negative impact.”

Many attendees at the meeting spoke up in opposition of MAPP. Kirk Rodgers, a third generation manager of family forestland, was the first member of the audience to speak. He asked the audience if those who opposed the project would stand.

Virtually everyone in the packed auditorium stood.

Rodgers said MAPP would have a significant negative impact on a variety of issues. He said it would lead to the permanent loss of 300 to 400 acres of productive timberland, as well as further fragmenting forestland.

“Fragmentation is one of the greatest threat to the forestry industry in Maryland,” Rodgers said.

Its impact on adjacent vegetation and loss of income from forests during the acquisition of land for the towers pose a threat as well.

He said he also is concerned about an increase in the number of trespassers, because the land on which transmission towers sit become major routes for vehicles, mountain bikes and four-wheelers.

“It’s very difficult to keep the public out,” he said.

Jeff Harding, a farmer from Vienna, also spoke out against MAPP.

“It is detrimental to the way we farm today,” he said. Harding said farmers will have to change irrigation patterns, which could double the costs of irrigation. It also will adjust the lay of the land because of transmission pole positions, he said, and could cause compaction and a change in soil composition.

MAPP could have an impact on the placement of children’s homes on farmland.

Jeff Chorman, a pilot and owner of Allen Chorman & Son in Milton, Del., said he is concerned about the project’s effect on his business.

“It’s not safe to work underneath these wires,” Chorman said. With ag airplanes going in excess of 160 miles per hour, and the height of the proposed transmission towers, it could prevent an ag airplane from safely pulling up, he added.

Chorman said he has noticed that transmission lines do affect planes’ GPS equipment, as well as causing static in their radios.

“There has to be another way to do this,” he said.

Environmental groups, private citizens, and representatives from Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge and the Dorchester County Chamber of Commerce also spoke in opposition of MAPP in its proposed state.

“Reliable electricity is very important to businesses in Dorchester County,” said Allen Nelson, executive director of the Dorchester County Chamber of Commerce. “We need to upgrade ... but as currently proposed, (MAPP) is not in the best interest of citizens in the county.”

There will be three more community meetings this month where Pepco will be available to answer questions about MAPP: Feb. 19 in Taylor’s Island; Feb. 24 in Church Creek; and Feb. 26 in Vienna.