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STATE SENATOR • 17TH SENATE DISTRICT

Capitol Update

By Senator Howard Marklein

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Understanding the Electric Transmission Line Process

Earlier this year, a major transmission line project was proposed in southwestern Wisconsin. Whenever these long-term projects begin, residents who may be impacted react with concern and often reach out to legislative offices to intervene in the process.

As your State Senator, I do not have a unique role in the process to determine the path of transmission lines. I have the same opportunity as any citizen to seek information and provide input, but I do not have any extraordinary influence; and this separation is intentionally by design. The goal is to take politics out of the process.

The transmission line process is managed solely by the Wisconsin Public Service Commission (PSC) to de-politicize decisions and enable individual citizens to have equal voices and ample opportunities to study, ask questions, provide input and seek resolution to issues they find with projects. The average transmission line review process takes several years from planning to public information to formal application and review. There are many opportunities for citizens to review, study and provide input.

According to the PSC, a utility must receive a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity (CPCN) for a transmission project that is either:

- 345 kilovolts (kV) or greater; or,
- less than 345 kV by greater than or equal to 100 kV, over one mile in length, and needing some new right-of-way.

The application for a CPCN triggers the official beginning of the PSC's Transmission Line Review Process, but much work is done before the formal process begins.

The PSC and Department of Natural Resources (DNR) portions of the project process are short when compared to the upfront planning, study and communications coordinated by the applicant company, which may begin months, if not years, before an application is submitted. While this part of the process is not formalized in state statute or by the PSC, it is important for citizens to begin studying and providing input directly to the company during this time.

Transmission companies have determined that they must lay a lot of groundwork before submitting a formal application and many have designed complex public relations and community outreach programs to connect with the people and communities who may be impacted by a proposed route for a transmission line. Public Information Meetings and Open Houses are a major part of this effort and are an important way for individual citizens to become involved.

During Public Information Meetings and Open Houses, applicant companies will seek to share their plans and rationale for constructing transmission lines along a number of routes. They will meet with stakeholders, residents, community leaders and other interested parties to discuss their plans. They are also seeking input from citizens to determine the support for various routes and other decisions. All impacted and interested citizens should begin participating in the process at this point. This is when changes can be made informally before the application is submitted.

Once the application is submitted to the PSC, the agency has 30 days to determine if the application is complete. If it is, the PSC then has 180 days to approve or deny the application with the option to extend for another 180 days for a total of 360 days. Throughout these 180/360 days, there is significant time dedicated, by statute, for public hearings, technical hearings and citizen input directly to the PSC. This is when a citizen can provide formal input to the agency.

If the application is approved by the PSC, the DNR has a small window of time to issue necessary permits and construction can begin. Depending on the size of the project and all of the factors involved with construction, the physical installation of the line may take years.

The PSC offers several briefs on the full Transmission Line Review process that are available online.

Application Review Process Flow Chart –

<http://psc.wi.gov/aboutUs/documents/PSC%20App%20process.pdf>

Transmission Line Review Process Outline –

<http://psc.wi.gov/thelibrary/publications/electric/electric08.pdf>

Once the application is submitted, public hearings are scheduled, but you are also welcomed to submit written comments. You will find the portal for submitting comments here -

<http://psc.wi.gov/apps40/dockets/comment.aspx>

I encourage every citizen who is interested in the Transmission Line Review process to take advantage of the many opportunities to study and discuss the projects that may impact them. It is important to be informed and aware of the steps so that your input and ideas become a part of the process.

For more information and to connect with me, visit my website

<http://legis.wisconsin.gov/senate/17/marklein> and subscribe to my weekly E-Update by sending an email to Sen.Marklein@legis.wisconsin.gov. Do not hesitate to call 800-978-8008 if you have input, ideas or need assistance with any state-related matters.

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