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Judge recommends power-line approval

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LA CRESCENT -- A proposed high-voltage power line that would cut across southeastern Minnesota has cleared a big hurdle.

Minnesota administrative law judge Beverly J. Heydinger advised Friday that all three of the high-voltage power lines proposed by CapX2020 be recommended for approval by the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission.

CapX2020 is a joint initiative of 11 utility companies -- including Rochester Public Utilities and Xcel Energy -- to build a power line from Brookings, S.D., to La Crosse, Wis. The proposal includes a 345-kilovolt power line that would run from Hampton to Rochester and east toward La Crosse.

While CapX2020 initiative spokesman Tim Carlsgaard said the utility companies are happy with the recommendations, those opposed to the \$1.7 billion transmission line project aren't thrilled.

La Crescent resident Jeremy Chipps said the judge's report was disappointing because she didn't add any conditions requiring that wind-generated power be used on the transmission lines.

"The judge's report does not address the real concerns of the people," Chipps said. "We want the clean, green energy future that President Obama has been proposing, not the large polluting power systems of the past."

Chipps is a member of Citizens Energy Task Force, which is a grass roots citizens group that supports clean, renewable and sustainable energy.

"We're concerned about our towns, but we've matured from there," Chipps said. "We're looking at what's best for the people of this country. The continued use of coal affects us all."

Utility representatives have said the new power line is needed to keep up with increasing energy demand due to growth in Rochester and La Crosse and to replace aging infrastructure. They've also said the lines will be used to deliver energy from wind power.

By 2025, utilities in Minnesota must get 25 percent of their energy from renewable sources.

Chipps believes the energy industry is at a crossroads and that lines wouldn't be needed if smaller companies were able to produce more energy locally.

"We feel that our engineers have done a thorough job in researching what's necessary for future transmission," Carlsgaard said.

Heydinger had asked for more information about the lines, including the proposed upsizing of the Rochester/La Crosse line.

"We know that we will need to upsize at some point in the future," Carlsgaard said. "We'd like to construct more robust structures so we could add another circuit and support double the capacity."

He said the double circuit wouldn't be built right away.

"It just makes sense to prepare for it now rather than have to build a new line beside it sometime down the road," Carlsgaard said.

For more information, go to Postbulletin.com/weblinks.

Minnesota Public Utilities Commission <http://www.puc.state.mn.us>

CapX2020 <http://www.capx2020.com>

Citizens Energy Task Force <http://www.cetf.us>