



Proposed power line upsets Houston County landowner

By Ryan Henry | Houston County News

Jim Gilmer owns 295 acres of land in northwest Houston County and southwest Winona County where he spends time playing with his grandchildren and hopes to allow his son to build a home someday. Those plans could be in jeopardy if a proposed high voltage power line weaves its way through southeastern Minnesota toward La Crosse.

Gilmer, along with several of his neighbors in Sather Valley, owns property along a possible route from Hampton, Minn., to La Crosse for the CapX2020 project. But he didn't find out about the project — or that it could cut through his land — until a little over a month ago. Planning for the project, which has options as to where it will run and ultimately cross the Mississippi River, began in 2007.

It wasn't until a neighbor called and asked whether he'd heard of plans for a power line to run through his farm.

"I'm going, 'You've got to be kidding me. I haven't gotten a word from anybody,'" Gilmer said.

On Wednesday, Gilmer and other neighbors met with Minnesota Sen. Sharon Erickson Ropes at his farm to convey their disappointment about the lack of information and their displeasure about the possibility of the line disrupting their homes.

"I think it's inexcusable," Gilmer said, of the lack of notification. "How can I own a piece of property and have a project of this scope coming right through it and not get one mailing, not even a generic letter some of the neighbors got?"

CapX2020 spokesman Tim Carlsgaard said the project sent about 22,000 letters to people along the proposed line, names it received from affected counties. He said he's heard from residents who said they didn't receive letters, and it's possible that some were missed.

"It's the counties that provide us with landowner data," Carlsgaard said. "Some counties are much better than others as far as the information they have and how updated it is."

Gilmer moved to the valley in 2005 and plans to sell 80 acres to his son, who wants to build on the land after his military service. Should the line go through, that won't be possible, and Gilmer fears his property value will plummet. He also worries about having his grandchildren near the lines.

“We’d have 345 kilovolts of electricity. What’s the health risk?” he said.

Ropes is opposed to the power line, as well.

“CapX2020 is bad for southeastern Minnesota, (and) it’s going to hurt the rural economy,” Ropes said. “When you have 15-story towers rolling through some of the best land we have in southeastern Minnesota, it’s a deep concern.”

Planning is far from finished, Carlsgaard said. CapX2020 is still collecting public input and has yet to submit a permit plan to the state of Minnesota, which will ultimately decide what path the line takes. Local governments will also be able to suggest modifications, which the state will take into consideration.

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