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Rural group opposes new power line

by Ken Haggerty

A crowd of over 60, many sporting "No CapX2020 in Warsaw, Stanton and Holden Township" stickers, showed up at an informational meeting in Cannon Falls on December 11, to voice concerns over the proposed new high voltage power line running from Hampton to Rochester and on to LaCrosse.

CapX2020 is a joint initiative of 11 regional utilities to expand the electric transmission grid by 2020. An application for a certificate of need is currently before a judge in St. Paul, with a decision possibly expected in January.

The application includes proposals for a 200 mile, 345 kilovolt (kV) transmission line from the Brookings, SD area to a proposed new substation just north and east of Hampton (this line would be bringing power from coal plants in South Dakota as well as new wind projects in southwestern Minnesota), a 250 mile 345 kV line between Fargo, St. Cloud and power plants in Monticello, a 70 mile 230 kV line between Bemidji and Grand Rapids and the 150 mile, 345 kV line between Hampton and Rochester, linking to LaCrosse.

The utilities cite studies showing expected growth and increase in customer demand for electricity as the reason for the project, which could cost close to \$2 billion in total. They have targeted construction for 2012-2015. Opponents of the project, like the Citizens Energy Task Force, led by Bev Topp of Eureka Township, have testified the need is not clear, especially for the line to Rochester-LaCrosse and that a weakening economy, conservation efforts and new technologies all should be considered in the 2020 planning process.

While the certificate of need is still pending, Xcel Energy spokesman Tom Hillstrom says the CapX2020 group is confident the need has been proven and has moved forward with the process for identifying possible routes for the power lines over the last year.

It was the recently released CapX2020 plans showing five specific possible routes for power lines between Hampton and Zumbrota with four out of five near Highway 56 and only one along Highway 52 that got local township residents concerned.

"Why they wouldn't locate it along Highway 52 is beyond me," said Warsaw resident Greg Soule, an attorney in the Twin Cities, who helped organize the township residents' opposition. Soule says placing 170 foot high towers every 1,000 feet will drastically alter the rural character of Warsaw and the other townships. "They are bringing the city to us. If I wanted to live in a business or industrial area, I would have bought property along 52," said Soule.

To see the detailed maps of proposed routes, go to www.capx2020.com. The Citizens Energy Task Force has a site at www.cetf.us with its case presented.

Included are incoming routes for the South Dakota line from the west into the proposed Hampton substation. One route comes in west of Hampton on 240th Street, zigzagging to 220th Street and passing the city of Hampton to the north. Another route comes in west of Randolph, along Highway 86 and 290th Street before heading to Hampton via Highway 47, passing Hampton to the south and east.

The maps from Hampton to Zumbrota are more convoluted. Besides the options of Highway 52 to Zumbrota and a couple of routes in the Highway 56 and Highway 60 corridors that would lead into Zumbrota, a number of possible crossing routes from Highway 56 to Highway 52 are shown, including Highway 19 and two crossings south of 19. Hillstrom said they are eager to gather as many comments and concerns as possible on proposed routes.