

News

Alternative Site For BGE Substation Revealed

by Nancy Jones

Just a little longer, promised BGE officials looking to see if a proposed regional substation could work on an alternative site located north of Reisterstown.

At an August 10 meeting of the Hanover Road Association, community leaders learned for the first time that BGE officials are considering placing the much-needed electrical substation on five parcels located on the west side of Md. Route 30, just north of the Interstate 795 intersection and just south of Camp Fretterd.

Just how well this new site fits the power company's needs should be revealed at the September 12 meeting of the Reisterstown-Owings Mills-Glyndon Coordinating Council, 7:30 p.m. at All Saints Church, 203 East Chastworth Avenue in Reisterstown. The public is invited to attend.

Local residents have been battling plans to build the substation on the 90-acre former Camp Holiday property, located off Kemp Road north of Glyndon. The substation would likely impact 30-to-40 acres of the property, according to plans.

Though BGE officials have stated they would be willing to place the unused portion in preservation or agricultural use, neighbors to the project complain it is too industrial and does not fit in with the surrounding rural, agricultural area.

More attractive site

That's why an alternative site -- especially one that doesn't detrimentally impact the community -- is so welcomed by local leaders. Still, nothing has been decided, cautioned BGE officials who had not completed their assessment of the Route 30 site.

And only four of the five property owners at the alternative site have expressed a willingness to sell, BGE is exploring the possibility of making the project work at the site with just the four parcels, said Rob Gould, a vice president with BGE.

"We'll know by the end of August if it will work," he said at the regularly-scheduled Hanover Road Association meeting. "It's looking positive. It is not

clear-cut...but we believe technically it may work."

Gould said during the month of August they conducted feasibility studies at the site and will be crunching the data when Hurricane Irene clean-up efforts are completed.

The BGE official said the alternative location is more attractive than the former Camp

Holiday site because it is closer to BGE's existing northwest substation and could provide easier access by both rail and road. BGE has been in "serious negotiations" with the four property owners, added Gould.

"We are agnostic about where the substation goes," he said. "But we do see real benefits at the alternative site."

Ticking clock

BGE officials first presented preliminary plans for the regional substation to community members last December and promised to come back in late spring with more details about the design and construction of the new facility.

However, working through community concerns and construction issues as well as taking into account the possible alter-

native location took more time than originally thought so the follow-up meeting didn't take place until August.

All this time, BGE officials have been racing to meet the demands that will be provided by the substation. The facility must be operating by 2015, a date mandated by PJM, a transmission organization that dictates the reliability needs in 13 states and Washington D.C.

To accomplish the deadline, BGE officials say they need to start construction by 2013.

"At the end of the day, the clock is ticking," said Gould.

Plans submitted

That's why BGE officials submitted plans on August 15 to Baltimore County development review authorities for the former Camp Holiday site. If necessary, the alternative site can be double tracked as another possible location.

This submittal is required now to navigate through the county's approval process in time for construction to begin and meet the 2015 operational deadline.

But BGE officials told the Hanover

Road Association members that they should know by August 31 if they can make the alternative site "technically" work. They will also need commitments from the four property owners and community support regardless of whether or not the site is technically feasible, said Gould.

However, due to Hurricane Irene, BGE officials have put the analysis on a back burner but still expect to have information available at the ROG meeting.

Annual review

Officials for PJM said in June that they review projects every year and will look this fall at this project as part of the annual process to see if it should be put on hold. Other transmission projects, such as the Potomac/Appalachian Transmission Highline (PATH) and Mid-Atlantic Power Pathway (MAPP), recently were put on hold by PJM due to new energy demand forecasts and planning figures.

Gould said he expects a decision by PJM in mid-September and would wait for that retooling process to be completed before making a decision on which property to utilize for the project.

"We really are trying to do the right thing here," said Gould. "We simply have to meet the need in front of us."

Swapping problems

George Harman, president of the Reisterstown-Owings Mills-Glyndon Coordinating Council, asked at the meeting if BGE has informed immediate neighbors to the alternative location about the possibility of the substation.

G. Scott Barhight, an attorney for BGE, said they wanted as much information as possible about whether or not the site would work with the four parcels before they go to the community.

Even if something is worked out with the alternative site, Gould said BGE also wants to ensure that they are not swapping problems from one community to another.

But already many community members, including the Valleys Planning Council and Hanover Road Association, have expressed support for the alternative site and are opposed to the regional substation at the former Camp Holiday site.

Kemp Road and Long Lane have been mentioned by BGE as a possible access roads and residents worry that the character of the small country roads will be compromised when equipment to build the facility is brought in.

Also the Camp Holiday site is locat-

ed within the state-designated and protected Piney Run Rural Legacy Area.

'A big step'

Teresa Moore, executive director of the Valleys Planning Council, said the former Camp Holiday is surrounded by permanently preserved property and is zoned for agriculture or rural uses.

"It's pretty clear that we will oppose the Camp Holiday site because of its location in the Rural Legacy area," said Moore.

She said she was pleased to hear the alternative site might work with only the four properties.

"The fact they think they came up with a design to not require that fifth property owner is a big step in the right direction," said Moore. "It's very good news."

Penny Levering, an adjacent property owner to the former Camp Holiday and who has her property in permanent preservation, said she too was relieved by what BGE officials said at the meeting.

"We're just hoping they will use the alternative site," she said. "We're all very wishful that will work."

Viable alternative

Leaders for the Hanover Road Association also said they hope the alternative site would work and would support the substation at that location. Glenn Elseroad, president of the association, said the site is wooded and secluded. It also would ensure the future of the corridor and entrance to the more rural and agricultural area of Hanover Road that lies further north of the property.

"We're working awfully hard to retain the rural atmosphere. There's a lot of interest in agricultural preservation in the area," said Elseroad. "That would lock up that corner. I'm very hopeful."

Maryland House of Delegate member A. Wade Kach, who represents the area, attended the Hanover Road Association meeting and said he, too, was pleased with the progress.

"BGE made it clear to me that the alternative site was preferable to them and I'm working to assist that," said Kach. "This is such a tribute to all the community associations involved that instead of just saying they're against it, they came up with a viable and preferable alternative."

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-Teresa Moore

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-Glenn Elseroad