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State approves PPL power line into upper Bucks County

The Morning Call

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A state agency today approved PPL Electric Utilities Corp.'s plan to build a 7.1-mile high-voltage power line from southern Lehigh County into upper Buck County over objections of several opponents.

In a unanimous vote in Harrisburg, the Public Utility Commission determined construction of the line is necessary to ensure continued reliable electricity to area customers.

"We're pleased with the decision, and we're going to move forward for planning with construction," PPL spokesman Paul Wirth said.

He said the company does not have a timetable for construction.

The PUC decision grants PPL the right to get easements over remaining tracts of land needed to build the transmission line. Bucks County Court will hold hearings to determine the value of the easements, Wirth said.

A PUC press release said the commission considered several issues raised by opponents, including the need for the proposed line, risk of danger to the health and safety of the public and compliance with regulations that protect natural resources.

The PUC vote followed a Jan. 30 decision by Administrative Law Judge Judge Angela T. Jones, who said the Allentown-based utility proved that the line and an accompanying substation are needed to meet a growing demand. She rejected opposing arguments from Springfield and Richland townships and others.

PPL unveiled its proposal for a new power line four years ago to replace a 69 kilovolt one that was built around 1930 primarily along Route 309 from the Coopersburg to the Quakertown areas.

The new power line will also transmit 69 kilovolts but can accommodate 138 kilovolts when needed. The \$13.1 million line would connect PPL's substations in Upper Saucon and Richland townships.

To carry the line, PPL plans to build about 72 metal structures, an average of 85 feet high and 525 feet apart, along the 7.1-mile route, that begins in Upper Saucon Township and continues through Springfield and into Richland.

PPL plans to build the substation control building on 85 acres of land it bought on Hickon Road in Springfield.

-- Reporting by Robert H. Orenstein, *The Morning Call*