Energy project faces scrutiny

The Adair County Commission filed a letter against Ameren

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The Mark Twain Transmission Project has a few more hurdles to clear before achieving final approval from the Missouri Public Service Commission next year.

Adair County Commissioners sent a letter to the Missouri Public Service Commission during June, which said they opposed the project. This has opened more opportunities for discussion of any issues the county has with the endeavor.

Public Service Commission spokesperson Kevin Kelly said the county commissioners' letter will require a local public hearing soon, where the public can voice their concerns to the PSC. He said the PSC will issue a press release with more information at a later date.

After the public hearing, Kelly said Adair County will be required to file all information by Oct. 21, while Ameren Transmission Company will be asked to file a rebuttal. He said both parties will be asked to give testimony Nov. 16, and a public evidentiary hearing will take place Dec. 14-18 to review submitted docments.

Once the hearing has concluded, Kelly said both parties will file briefs with the commission by Jan. 15 and can file a reply by Jan. 29. After Jan. 29, Kelly said the PSC will begin its investigation.

"The commission will wait until all the paperwork has been filed to make a decision," Kelly said. "However, a statutory deadline does not exist."

Peggy Ladd, director of transmission stakeholder relations at Ameren, said the main goal of this process is for all parties to ask and answer questions about the case. She said Ameren hopes to hear a final decision from the PSC by February.

"If we get an answer, Ameren will spend 2016 acquiring property and purchasing right of way," Ladd said. "We're not taking right of way, but purchasing it through a perpetual lease."

Ladd said the project will provide improved access to renewable energy, improve the quality of the electric system in the county and decrease energy costs for Adair County residents.

Ladd said if all goes well for Ameren, road work likely will begin during 2016, and she said the company hopes to begin construction by the end of 2016.

Several Adair County residents still have concerns about the project, including Kirksville resident Sheila Pruett. Pruett runs Jacob's Vineyard and Winery and she said the power lines will cut through a section of her land. She said she already is losing business because of the project — she said couples looking to have wedding pictures done at the winery and vineyard have opted to change locations because they don't want the power lines in their photos.

Pruett said she also is concerned about safety issues the power lines could cause. Pruett runs the Developing Essential Learning Through Agriculture program, and she said many participants have medical devices the electricity could interfere with.

She said though Ameren said there are no medical side effects from the electricity, she is worried those with cochlear implants or heart stents could have problems with the devices malfunctioning and even breaking if they are too close to or exposed to the electricity for too long.

Pruett also said she thinks the lease that Ameren is purchasing land with is not fair to landowners.

"There are people on the line with homesteads that have been in their families for a hundred years," Pruett said. "Those are the ones who are hurting. Money can pay them for the hard work they put into the homes, but it can't replace memories."

The PSC will issue a press release with more information about an upcoming hearing where residents can voice their concerns.

HY-VEE | Hy-Vee updates include improvements to electrical, plumbing and lighting fixtures

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store a more modern Hy-Vee appearance and double the square-footage of the building. Johnson said there are 11 Hy-Vee gas stations with a format similar to Kirksville's convenience store, and all of them are in the process of being updated.

"The format that we have in our store, we really don't do that format anymore, and it's really not in keeping with our Hy-Vee brand," Johnson said. "It's just not the image we want to have for our gas stations."

Johnson said a more important reason for expanding the store is the options will expand as well. The new designs will include an expanded beverage bar, expanded coffee selections, hot food options and nicer bathrooms. Johnson said the improvements create a need for extra staff, especially for the fresh food options. He said the expansion likely will create three to five part-time jobs and one to two full-time jobs.

Johnson said he thought the 60-day construction project will be completed by the end of 2015.

"We're excited to have the project close to getting underway," Johnson said. "I think it will expand our offerings that we have for our customers, and it will make our store be much more competitive and comparable to what you see in new convenience stores today."

Johnson said all construction and architectural details are being handled by the Hy-Vee Construction company. Johnson, who began working for the Kirksville store during January, said he was aware the 2015 fiscal budget has been in the planning process for several years. He said Hy-Vee has projected the expansion to cost more than half a million dollars.

Hy-Vee Construction is equipped to handle all construction needs for refrigerated and dry storage, warehousing, food processing and handling facilities, retail construction, and remodels according to its website, hy-veeconstruction.com. The website also provides updates on current construction projects.

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