

# Holmen School Board considers opposing power line route

Onalaska-Holmen Courier-Life

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The Holmen School Board is considering a resolution opposing a high voltage power line project.

The board could take action on the proposal Nov. 28 after hearing comments Monday night for and against the proposed CapX2020 high-voltage line and a proposed Wisconsin power line extension.

Jay Clark, associate superintendent, said the resolution looks at five issues: health and safety, short- and long-term financial implications, land use implications, residential growth implications and energy needs in western Wisconsin.

## Location concerns

One of the concerns is the proximity of the power line to Holmen school buildings. The proposed routes are as close as 225 feet to a proposed middle school, 450 feet from Prairie View Elementary and 575 feet to the high school.

School board member Cheryl Hancock said she opposes the lines being near the schools but questioned the source of the resolution. "It's almost word for word what La Crosse County was presented with," she said.

Hancock said she wanted to see the studies on health concerns and purported economic damage to property values, community and pupil growth.

Clark said it was the same resolution presented to the town of Farmington, but that the district's Building and Grounds Committee saw it as an accurate representation of the issues. He added that advocates and opponents were in on discussions.

## Need questioned

Proponents of the \$450 million project say it is needed to upgrade outdated infrastructure and improve service reliability.

Grant Stevenson, senior project manager for Xcel Energy, said electric usage is rising again. In 2011, each utility passed its peak reached in 2006, he said. Xcel's usage is up 4 percent from last year.

But a draft environmental impact statement by the Wisconsin Public Service Commission questions the power companies' population growth and energy demand estimates.

“The applicants state that the growing demand for electricity in the La Crosse/Winona area would exceed the capabilities of the existing electrical system to deliver power reliably under contingency conditions,” the PSC said. “At this time, that conclusion is still being questioned.”

Mike Herro, La Crosse area Xcel community service manager, said the growth in the region, especially Holmen, warrants higher capacity. “Usage is on the uptrend,” he said. “This will serve us for the next 20 to 30 years.”

### **Health concerns**

Opponents of the project are concerned the electromagnetic frequency of the lines will cause health problems for nearby residents.

Travis Simpson told the board that through his research he found that doctors can’t say electromagnetic fields cause certain diseases such as Parkinson’s disease, leukemia or multiple sclerosis, but there could be a connection.

“Doctors call (EMFs) a promoter,” Simpson said. “I can’t tell you there will be sick kids,” he added. “But they (pointing to Xcel officials) can’t tell you it won’t.”

Stevenson said that magnetic fields drop off quickly with distance. At 200 feet away, EMFs are negligible, he said.

Joe Morse, who lives in Winona, Minn., and opposes the high voltage lines, said while there’s no direct correlation between EMFs and leukemia, those living near transmission lines have a 1.5 to 2 times more likely to develop those problems than people not living near lines.

“How certain does a community have to be to take preventive measures?” he asked.

### **Coal connection**

Linda Van Art, a public health nurse for La Crosse County, said the lines are only needed to provide a demand for the \$2 billion coal industry in North Dakota. The burning of the coal in North Dakota would create the energy sent over the transmission lines toward the East Coast where it can be sold for high profits.

Turning away from the school board members to face about 25 students in the audience, Van Art said: “Young people, we cannot have any more coal-generated electricity. You don’t have a future if we continue to use coal.”



Joe Morse, a representative of the Citizens Energy Task Force, talks about power line health studies with the Holmen School Board Monday night.

**Input:** The PSC is taking public comments about the CapX2020 draft environmental impact statement through Dec. 23. Comments can be emailed to [william.fannucchi@wisconsin.gov](mailto:william.fannucchi@wisconsin.gov). The draft document can be downloaded at [psc.wi.gov](http://psc.wi.gov).

### Power line proposal:

The high-voltage power line that has a proposed route that takes it close to Holmen school buildings would be part of a new transmission line grid that runs from the Dakotas to Madison.

The final leg of the proposed CapX2020 345-kilovolt line would run from Alma and terminate somewhere in northern La Crosse County, although the location has not been finalized. One possible location is on Briggs Road south of Holmen.

Another power line project called Badger Coulee, proposed by the American Transmission Company, would link with the CapX2020 line and bring another 150-mile high voltage line from the town of Farmington to Madison.

If approved, the Wisconsin power lines would likely be in service by 2016.

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