

# La Crosse County Board opposes power lines

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The La Crosse County Board on Thursday formally opposed two proposed high-voltage power line projects that would route through the county.

“There isn’t a need for this line,” said Supervisor Marilyn Pedretti, who introduced the resolution objecting to the CapX2020 and American Transmission Company 345-kilovolt lines.

Though mostly symbolic, the county’s stance will be recorded with the Public Service Commission as it considers applications for the two projects in the coming year.

The \$450 million CapX2020 line would extend about 150 miles from Hampton, Minn., to the La Crosse area, crossing the Mississippi River at Alma and ending at a new substation near Holmen. Construction would begin in 2013, with the line in service by 2015.

The ATC Badger Coulee line would continue another 150 miles to Dane County.

The projects would upgrade an outdated system and help meet the increasing demands for power, plus channel wind farm electricity, said Mike Herro, a spokesman for Xcel Energy, part of a CapX2020 consortium that includes La Crosse-based Dairyland Power Cooperative and nine other utilities in Minnesota, the Dakotas, Iowa and Wisconsin.

But opponents say energy demand is declining and these lines will carry “dirty coal” electricity, rather than from sustainable sources, to the east. Yet customers in the region will bear the costs.

They fear the lines will harm property values and the health of those near the lines, citing studies that electromagnetic fields, or EMFs, can cause cancer and other ailments.

The Citizens Energy Task Force earlier had given the county’s Executive Committee a petition opposing the lines, signed by 782 people, almost 70 percent of them La Crosse County residents, they said.

One potential route comes dangerously close to Holmen High School fields and Prairieview Elementary, several speakers told the committee.

“That’s unacceptable, to be that close to the kids,” said David Brady of Holmen.

Herro pointed out that route is among several available to the PSC, which plans to have public hearings in March.

Supervisor Leon Pfaff, whose district includes the town of Farmington, in the path of the proposed lines, said 90 to 95 percent of the constituents who contacted him spoke against the projects.

“The concern out there is quite high,” Pfaff said.

The Holmen School Board voted Nov. 28 to oppose the transmission lines, as the Holland and Farmington town boards had done earlier.

Supervisor Bill Feehan argued the projects would create jobs. “We need an energy infrastructure that’s going to be here to help us build this economy and get people back to work,” Feehan said.

The board’s vote was 26-2, with Feehan and Ray Ebert dissenting. Four supervisors — Ralph Geary, Audrey Kader, John Medinger and Don Meyer — abstained.

Herro was disappointed with the decision, calling the resolution “short-sighted, not constructive, not well thought out.”

Said Herro, “It’s ultimately up to the Public Service Commission to decide if the line is needed and where it should go.”