

May 26, 2011

Energy Planning & Information Committee
Town of Stark, Vernon County
403 West Main Street
La Farge, WI 54639

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Dear Greg Hoffmann,

We read with great interest your April 18, account of organizational activities during the public information phase of the proposed Badger-Coulee transmission project. We would like to direct your attention to the government bodies and businesses that are also taking a careful look at the proposal. Most parties are starting to ask American Transmission Company to elaborate upon the important benefits of the project they have only presented only as brief "bullets" in literature sent to homes and businesses located within 1500 feet of a potential corridor.

In March, the Town of Stark, through the Committee we serve on, invited ATC to La Farge to answer questions that we provided in advance about the public need for the project, costs and quality monitoring for the renewable energy aspect. These questions were derived from ATC's stated benefits and ones citizens and groups had formulated in letters to ATC that are going unanswered. At the meeting, we were told by ATC that questions about the demand for imported power and grid system reliability are best attended to and answered by professionals in the utility industry. Concerning long-term impacts on Wisconsin utility bill totals, we were told that project is the first its kind and that payment arrangements are not yet known. When asked about the actual "savings" that might be come with greater access to wholesale electricity and the percentage of renewable to non-renewable fuels that would be supplied, we were told that ATC is not the party to be asking these questions and to contact the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin. Unsure why the PSC would be recommended to address statements mailed to our doorsteps by the developer, a member of the Committee did, however, meet with a PSC representative in Madison and it was confirmed that local governments, businesses and citizens should write the developer directly with questions of this nature and that doing so during the public information phase is appropriate.

In due respect to our public relation friends at ATC who suggested in your article that there is plenty of time left to learn about the project, a growing number of individuals understand this period is crucial if there is to be meaningful and productive public participation. The next 17-21 months, before the developer's application is submitted, is time set aside for informing the public. To insure that proposed ratepayer investment of this scale and cost is sound and far-reaching, the public discussion needs to include tough questions like energy-use planning options and specific demand and reliability issues that the Badger-Coulee high capacity line would address.

So far, the proposal has come to the people of Wisconsin without comprehensive energy-use goals or accounting for how it would affect the state's carbon footprint. Savings from wholesale electricity are stated only as potential and the benefit is inconsistent with the States experience with wholesale pricing which started in 2005. Grid and demand problems can be solved in a variety of ways. Citizens need to know what options there are through studies and cost comparisons.

Experts who have seen the regional grid expansion plans that Badger-Coulee and CapX2020 would match, suggest that dramatically emphasizing regional import and resale could be cost restrictive in the long term and would probably come with significant risks. Differences in opinions are to be expected. Balanced solutions that meet the visions of developers and those of the public require a lively exchange.

Together, the two transmission proposals seek 210 miles of 140-170' high towers across land owned by hundreds of residents with payment likely assumed by electric customers in the State or possibly within a region covering 13 states. It is understandable that citizens and local governments facing such possible sacrifice would want to have the necessities and all options fully explained to them. Most electric customers understand that significantly reducing dependency on fossil fuels will require investments, ratepayers need detailed projections for several possible solutions and outcomes as with any financial planning exercise.

Electricity use is leveling off and dropping as never before and much of this due to less industrial use. Growth in electricity was projected as around 1% even before the economy entered this slower phase. Many are observing as they look at this proposal, that now is the perfect time to pause, step back and try to come up with the most-sensible, affordable solutions. Is now the best time to endorse projects designed to complement very costly regional investments and possibly require other lines like them in the State? We will not know until tough questions are asked and much more is available for public consideration.

Next up on ATC's schedule are "Open Houses" in which residents will be invited to make comments about "siting" options. Citizens, business-owners and local governments will attend these presentations to learn how they can begin preparing their responses to protect their interests. But as the slow siting process begins, many will also be asking ATC to begin explaining, with the documentation, why they feel high voltage transmission is a public necessity.

Sincerely,

Brian Jacobs, Hometown & Country Realty -
Leah Jaynes, Junior, La Farge High School, National Honor Society
Samantha Liskowski, Green Apple Inn
Peggy Pasker, Chair, La Farge School Board, La Farge Lions Club
Christel Stueckrad, La Farge home-owner
Bryon Walker, Walker Legal Services, La Farge
Bob Goonin, Organic Valley Food Cooperative
Joan Kent, Friends of the Kickapoo Valley Reserve
Rob Danielson, FieldPost Sound Recording & Mixing

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