

PATH stopped in its tracks

PJM Transmission and FirstEnergy withdraw application

BRYAN CLARK Spirit Staff

CHARLES TOWN — On Monday, February 28, officials from FirstEnergy (which absorbed Allegheny Energy on February 25) and PJM Transmission announced that work on the Potomac-Appalachian Transmission Highline (PATH) will cease. This follows a long battle between energy companies and local property owners and activists who opposed the planned power line.

A pair of press releases from PJM and FirstEnergy said that plans for PATH were shelved

because energy demand has dropped following the recession. According to the PJM release: "Over the last two years, the recession and the dramatic change in the economic outlook caused PJM to forecast lower growth in the use of electricity. Growth in the use of electricity correlates with economic growth. The forecasted slower growth rate likely will delay the need for the line." PJM and FirstEnergy have therefore decided to shelve the project for the immediate future. According to FirstEnergy's release: "the PATH companies will immediately suspend most activ-

ities on the project except for those that may be necessary to return the project to active status at the conclusion of PJM's planning process review."

Anti-PATH activist Patience Wait celebrated the announcement as a victory for her cause. "This is a complete affirmation of what we've been saying," she said. She claimed that the project could have been shelved a year ago, and that it was never actually needed. She said that a line being renovated by Dominion made PATH superfluous. The

◆ See PATH page 5A

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PATH

From PAGE 1

latest report, she said, "showed the hollowness of power companies' claims that PATH was necessary."

Wait said that the announcement was a cause for celebration for landowners and activists. "I don't think they expected the kind of fight that we've been giving them," she said. She said that 150 out of 350 landowners in the area affected by PATH had actively fought against it. Activists and landowners were able to win

public opinion to their side, she said, and that was "critical" to the eventual shelving of PATH.

In an e-mail to the Spirit, representatives of FirstEnergy said that Anti-PATH activism had nothing to do with the suspension of work. "This action is solely the result of PJM's decision to suspend the PATH project while it evaluates its planning process," they wrote.

The press releases from PJM and FirstEnergy do note that the stoppage is temporary, though they do not say when they plan to reactivate work on PATH. "If they want to try it again, we will be back bigger, stronger, and better prepared," promised Wait.