

**Albemarle County Planning Commission
Work Session and Regular Meeting
Final Minutes October 8, 2024**

The Albemarle County Planning Commission held a public hearing on Tuesday, September 10, 2024, at 4:30 p.m.

Members attending were: Fred Missel, Chair; Luis Carrazana, Vice-Chair; Karen Firehock (arrived approx. 5:15 p.m.) Julian Bivins; Lonnie Murray; and Nathan Moore

Members absent: Corey Clayborne

Other officials present were: Michael Barnes, Director of Planning; Andy Herrick, County Attorney's Office; Kevin McDermott, Deputy Director of Planning; Tonya Swartzendruber, Planning Manager; and Carolyn Shaffer, Clerk to the Planning Commission

Call to Order

Ms. Shaffer called the roll.

Mr. Missel established a quorum.

Consent Agenda

Mr. Moore motioned to approve the Consent Agenda as presented. Mr. Carrazana seconded the motion, which carried unanimously (5-0). (Ms. Firehock and Mr. Clayborne were absent.)

Public Hearings

SP202400002 Midway-Martin Store Powerline Upgrade

Kevin McDermott, Deputy Director of Planning, said that he would provide the staff report on the Midway-Martin Store Powerline Upgrade, Transmission Line Phase 2. He said that this was an application to upgrade approximately 2.8 miles of the existing transmission line from Thunder Ridge Road in southwest Albemarle County to the Martin Store substation in Nelson County. He said that this was phase two of the project.

Mr. McDermott said that the first phase had gone northward and northeastward from Thunder Ridge Road to the Midway substation, located near the intersection of Midway Road and Miller School Road. He said that the existing 60-to-70-foot wooden H-poles were proposed to be replaced with 58 feet to 82.5 feet steel monopoles within the existing right-of-way. He said that he wanted to highlight that they had recently discovered an error in the applicant's narrative regarding the proposed height of the new poles.

Mr. McDermott said that the correct height was actually between 58 feet and 82.5 feet, which was substantially similar to the existing H-poles. He said that the steel monopoles would be installed within the existing right-of-way. He said that the map provided showed the location of the transmission line, which extended into Nelson County to approximately Route 151. He said that the upgrade was necessary due to the existing wooden poles being over 40 years old and showing signs of deterioration. He said that this line served almost 6,750 customers, and the replacement would improve the reliability of the system.

Mr. McDermott said that the petition was for energy and communication transmission facilities under Section 10.2.26 of the Zoning Ordinance. He said that the project affected 41 parcels of land totaling approximately 587.9 acres, with no proposed dwelling units. He said that the zoning was rural area, and the comprehensive plan recommended this area as rural area. He said that the proposal involved replacing existing poles within the existing right-of-way, with limited and temporary construction impacts. He said that staff believed that the adjacent lots would not be substantially affected.

Mr. McDermott said that the character of the nearby area would remain unchanged, as the new poles were mostly similar to the existing ones. He said that no grading was proposed, and the impact on vegetation would be limited. He said that the zoning ordinance required reliable electrical service, and the proposed poles were in harmony and supportive of the agricultural and residential uses in the district. He said that the proposal was evaluated against the relevant regulations in Section 5. He said that staff's opinion was that it was consistent with the requirements in the Zoning Ordinance and therefore recommended approval of the request.

Mr. Missel opened the public hearing. He asked if the applicant had a presentation.

Charles Ward, Vice President of Engineering Services at Central Virginia Electric Co-op, said that it was his responsibility and that of his team to oversee substation and transmission projects within their service area. He said that this was Special Permit 202400002. He said that as the vicinity map showed, and as Mr. McDermott had mentioned earlier, the area from Thunder Ridge Road down to the County line, all within the existing easement.

Mr. Ward said that the easement was 150 feet wide, and it was currently utilized by a single transmission line. He said that approximately 40 years ago, there were two transmission lines in this easement. He said that one was removed, leaving behind the structures that were present today, which were H-frame structures. He said that as displayed on the screen, the existing line ran along the right side of the easement as one moved south, providing an opportunity for them to relocate the new line to the center of the easement.

Mr. Ward said that upon completion of the project, the new line would be situated in the center of the easement, close to the existing structures. He said that they would then go back and remove the H-frame structures. He said that this was a radial feed system, which had no backup. He said that when the line failed, they would lose 6,750 customers until the issue was resolved. He said that they had experienced several instances of this in the past few years. He said that the cross arms and wood poles were deteriorating.

Mr. Ward said that the cross arms were particularly problematic, as they were rotting from the inside out, making it difficult to detect issues until they broke. He said that the existing pole range was 45 to 70 feet. He said that Phase 2 of the project consisted of approximately 2.8 miles from Thunder Ridge Road down to the County line. He said that Phase 1, completed in 2023, involved two years of replacing 3.4 miles of line, starting from the Midway substation, which was located just north of the Miller School, down to Thunder Ridge Road. He said that they had divided the project into two phases due to financial and manpower constraints.

Mr. Ward said that as previously mentioned, the line would be constructed within their 150-foot easement, and no additional easements would be required. He said that their easements were well-maintained, and they would not need to cut any trees or perform any other activities outside of the easement. He said that some minor trimming of trees may be necessary, but this would be

limited to within the easement. He said that the transmission line upgrade was a pole replacement project, where they were replacing the conductor but not increasing its size.

Mr. Ward said that this upgrade allowed them to build a new line and then cut over to the new line, making it easier to maintain and upgrade the system. He said that they were replacing the conductor, but the poles would be the same size. He said that the poles were being upgraded from wood to ductile iron, ranging in height from 58 feet to 82.5 feet. He said that this was due to the single pole construction, which provided a more aesthetically pleasing appearance. He said that while it required a slight increase in height, the result was a visually appealing line.

Mr. Ward said that if they would like to visit the existing line, which spanned 3.2 miles, they would find it to be a well-maintained and attractive installation. He said that the current pole line was approximately 40 years old and served 6,750 members through four substations, including the Wintergreen Resort area and the pumping station, which supplied water for fire safety and other purposes on the mountain. He said that this upgrade would significantly increase the reliability of their customers and the CVEC system. He said that the ductile iron poles were resistant to damage from woodpeckers, insects, rot, and weather, and they had a natural finish that blended in with the surrounding environment, making them nearly indistinguishable from a tree.

Mr. Ward said that he understood that they were working on a new comprehensive plan, and they were aware that it was still in the process of being finalized. He said that as such, they had addressed both the AC44 and 2015 comprehensive plans. He said that the transmission line fell within the rural area three and aligned with the goals and objectives of both comprehensive plans. He said that this project was consistent with the 2015 Comprehensive Plan, which supported private electric, telephone, and other services to customers in the community. He said that it also aligned with the current draft comprehensive plan's Objective 3.6.

Mr. Ward said that the project's impact on public facilities and infrastructure would be minimal. He said that it was a rural area with a mix of vacant, residential, farmland, and hunting property. He said that the provided diagram showed the single monopole on the left and the H-frame on the right. He said that no impacts were expected from the proposed project due to the work being performed in an existing right-of-way.

Mr. Ward said that the design would avoid sensitive areas and utilize rubber-tracked vehicles to minimize disruption. He said that the majority of the truck traffic would be in the right-of-way, and they would work with the adjacent landowners to provide access to the right-of-way. He said that they had invested significant time and effort into the design, and the provided detailed drawing showcased their approach. He said that they even highlighted potential environmental impacts, such as trees and small streams and ponds, to ensure a thorough assessment.

Mr. Ward said that vegetation management was a significant undertaking for them, as they performed extensive work each year to cut and maintain their right-of-ways. He said that their 4,500-mile system of lines required meticulous maintenance. He said that CVEC invested over \$2.5 million annually in vegetation management, a testament to their commitment to environmental stewardship. He said that they were proud to serve as the caretaker of the environment. He said that CVEC had received a Habitat Partners Certificate from the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries as recognition.

Mr. Murray said that he would like to make a comment. He said that first, he would like to express his gratitude. He said that he used to live in a house along the route of the power line that was being upgraded in the Batesville area. He said that prior to moving to Sugar Hollow, where he

currently resided, he experienced a significantly high quality in power reliability through the co-op, compared to his experience with Dominion in Sugar Hollow. He said that he would like to thank them all for their work.

Mr. Murray said that he also appreciated the efforts being made to minimize herbicide use. He said that as a botanist, his wife and he had observed that some of the most critically important species of rare plants could be found in the right-of-ways of power lines. He said that minimizing herbicide use was also important, and Dominion had not adopted this approach. He said that he had seen numerous areas with rare plant communities that had been affected by herbicide use were maintained by Dominion. He said that he appreciated the efforts of CVEC.

Ms. Firehock said that this service area was within her district. She said that she understood that it would extend into Nelson County, helping with critical needs such as ensuring the pumps at Wintergreen did not fail, thereby transporting water up the mountain. She asked if the applicant could describe the service area of this line. She asked if the service area for this line was primarily within Albemarle County.

Mr. Ward said that they were located primarily within the southern part of Albemarle County, and it served customers all along their distribution line. He said the transmission line served substations, carrying power to the substations without serving specific customers. He said that the substations then distributed the power back out to customers. He said that this transmission line carried power from Midway, which supplied power to distribution lines throughout Albemarle County. He said that the line also connected with the distribution line at Martin Store, further serving customers in Albemarle County. He said that as a result, when the line went out, it could affect a large number of customers.

Ms. Firehock said that a significant outage occurred recently in Nelson and Albemarle, affecting multiple services, including gas stations and the local brewery. She said that despite this recent incident, the service had indeed improved significantly over the last decade, providing much more reliable service.

Mr. Murray said that even when his power went out in Batesville, it returned very quickly. He said that he did not understand why his power did not come back on sooner at his house in Sugar Hollow.

Mr. Carrazana asked if there was a potential for back feeding this line.

Mr. Ward said that there was no back feed for this particular line. He said that they had reviewed back feed from other areas, and it was very expensive. He said that additionally, due to the terrain and the location situated near the foot of the mountains, it presented a challenge. He said that to access this area, they would need to come from Colleen and tie back into Martin's Store, a distance of approximately 10 or 12 miles across the hills. He said that they had considered this option, which would improve reliability and provide the best route to customers by offering a backup.

Mr. Missel said that he had a question regarding the vegetation management plan. He said that he was curious to know how frequently they reviewed and assessed this plan to determine if it remained suitable or if changes were necessary.

Mr. Ward said that they reviewed it yearly. He said that he believed that the cycle was approximately 10 years for the entire system. He said that with a total of 4,500 miles, they completed around

450 miles per year. He said that they used a variety of methods, including tree trimming, bush hogging, and a helicopter for this task.

Mr. Missel asked if any members of the public wished to speak on this item. Seeing none, he closed the public hearing, and the matter rested with the Commission.

Ms. Firehock motioned to recommend approval of SP202400002 Midway-Martin Store Powerline Upgrade, with the conditions included in the staff report. Mr. Murray seconded the motion, which carried unanimously (6-0). (Mr. Clayborne was absent.)

Adjournment

At 6:55 p.m., the Commission adjourned to Tuesday, October 22, 2024, Albemarle County Planning Commission meeting, 4:00 p.m., Lane Auditorium.



Michael Barnes, Director of Planning

(Recorded by Carolyn S. Shaffer, Clerk to Planning Commission & Planning Boards; transcribed by Golden Transcription Services)

Approved by Planning Commission
Date: 10/22/2024
Initials: CSS