

# Residents have plenty to say about proposed Transmission line

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By Ken Hanson

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PINE ISLAND — Penny Robinson tried to steady her emotions before a microphone Wednesday at the American Legion hall in Pine Island.

In retirement at her rural Oronoco home, “I was looking forward to sitting by the pond and reading some good books. What I wasn’t planning on was CapX2020 smashing my dream to bits, and destroying the quality and safety of my existence,” she said.

Robinson was among about 200 people who packed the hall to register comments and questions about the routing of the massive CapX2020 power transmission line that has been cleared to run through the Rochester area en route to the Kellogg area and Wisconsin. The Pine Island meeting was one of three held this week by the Minnesota Office of Energy Security to gather public comments on a draft environmental impact statement that is key to determining the power line’s final route.

The first meetings were Tuesday in Plainview, with 30 residents in the afternoon and 60 in the evening. An afternoon session in Pine Island drew 85. Two more sessions were scheduled for today, at 1:30 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. in the Cannon Falls High School auditorium.

The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission approved the need for CapX2020 in 2009, and the plan survived a court battle. What remains to be determined is the route. Some 62 alternative route segments from Hampton to Kellogg “are under equal consideration at this point,” said Matthew Langan, a state Office of Energy Security planning director who conducted the meeting.

Five utilities are involved with the Hampton-to-Kellogg project, three of which — Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency; Rochester Public Utilities; and Wisconsin-based Dairyland Power Cooperative, which supplies energy to People’s Cooperative — serve customers in Rochester and surrounding areas. Xcel Energy also is a part of CapX2020.

Oronoco Township recently hired a team of Twin Cities lawyers to attempt to get the line routed north of it.

“Our opinion is that (Oronoco Township) is the least-desirable route, based on the number of homes affected and the impact on property values,” said Mark Thein, an Oronoco Township supervisor.

Several residents at the Wednesday night meeting questioned why the power line isn’t being routed along U.S. 52 through Rochester, then east to the Mississippi River along Interstate 90. (Most of the CapX2020 route from Hampton to Zumbrota is along U.S. 52.)

Langan said the power line will need a 150-foot right of way, and such a corridor isn’t available in Rochester. A route along I-90 to La Crosse, Wis., would be prevented by a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Area, the steep grades and otherwise difficult terrain in the bluff country of extreme southeastern Minnesota, he said.

The CapX2020 line will carry power generated by a number of sources, including wind, coal and nuclear, said Tom Hillstrom, CapX2020 permitting manager. “It will benefit the whole region,” he said, “but the impact is focused on a few people. And you really can’t blame them — it’s a big burden to bear, and that’s why you see this number of people show up and the level of emotion. “You’re never going to find a route that makes everyone happy, so you find a route that minimizes impact.”



## Hearings

- Last of three **public meetings** for Hampton-to-Wabasha segment: 1:30 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. today, Cannon Falls High School auditorium.
- **Contested Case Hearing** before a Judge: week of June 13.

## Timeline

- Construction to begin: spring 2012.
- Project to be completed: winter 2015.