

June 26, 2024

Minnesota Public Utilities Commission
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Comment on the Merit of the Certificate of Need Application
Minnesota Energy Connection Project
Docket Nos. CN-22-131/TL-22-132

Impacted property: XXX 135th St NE Atwater, MN 56209 (legally described as The East 70 rods of the North 27.88 rods of the South Half of the Northeast Quarter of Section 6, Township 119, Range 33, Kandiyohi County, Minnesota); approximate location: [45.1488°, -94.8617°]

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1. Should the Commission grant a certificate of need for the proposed project?

No, the Commission should not grant a certificate of need for the Minnesota Energy Connection Project. Several compelling reasons underpin this position:

- a. Environmental Impact:** The construction of a transmission line has significant adverse effects on the local environment. It causes habitat destruction, disruption of local wildlife, and potential contamination of natural resources. The environmental consequences of such a project strongly outweigh the purported benefits.
- b. Property Rights and Values:** The proposed transmission line threatens private property, leading to a decrease in property values and the infringement of property rights. The presence of a transmission line detracts from the aesthetic value of the landscape and reduces the desirability of the area for residential or commercial use.
- c. Health Concerns:** There are growing concerns about the health impacts of living near high-voltage power lines. Exposure to electromagnetic fields (EMFs) has been linked to various health issues, including an increased risk of cancer. Ensuring the safety and well-being of the community is the highest priority.
- d. Alternative Solutions:** Before proceeding with such a disruptive project, it is crucial to explore and exhaust all possible alternatives. This includes investing in local renewable energy sources, improving energy efficiency, and upgrading existing infrastructure. The proposed transmission line is not the most efficient or sustainable solution.
- e. Public Disapproval:** The overwhelming sentiment among the community is one of strong opposition. The local citizens, constituents, and property owners don’t want the transmission line built. Public comments submitted by

the community members have expressed clear disapproval of the project, citing concerns about property devaluation, environmental harm, and health risks. The only voices in favor come from Xcel Energy itself and a few organizations with vested interests in the project. The unanimous opposition from those directly affected by the transmission line should be the most significant factor in the Commission's decision-making process.

f. Commission's Duty to Public Interest: It is the Commission's responsibility to uphold the wishes of the public, not the interests of a power company. Commissioners have sworn an oath (Minnesota Statute 216A.03, Subd. 4) to faithfully discharge their duties, support the Constitution, and remain free from any pecuniary interest in the entities they regulate. This oath underscores their obligation to prioritize the well-being and interests of the community members who will bear the brunt of the project's impact. Favoring the power line company over the overwhelming opposition from the public would not only disregard the community's concerns but also breach the commissioners' sworn commitment to serve impartially and with integrity.

2. If granted, what additional conditions or requirements, if any, should be included in the certificate of need?

If the Commission decides to grant the certificate of need despite the opposition, several conditions and requirements must be mandated to mitigate the negative impacts:

a. Comprehensive Environmental Impact Assessment: A thorough and independent environmental impact assessment must be conducted to identify and address potential ecological and health risks. This assessment must include strategies for minimizing environmental damage.

b. Property Compensation and Safeguards: Property owners affected by the construction must be adequately compensated for any loss in property value and any inconvenience caused. Additionally, clear safeguards must be established to protect property rights and ensure that construction and maintenance activities do not unduly disrupt the lives of local residents.

c. Health and Safety Standards: Strict health and safety standards must be enforced to protect the community from potential risks associated with the transmission line. This includes implementing buffer zones and monitoring EMF levels to ensure they remain within safe limits.

d. Community Involvement and Transparency: The project must involve continuous engagement with the local community, ensuring transparency in decision-making processes and giving residents a platform to voice their concerns and suggestions. Regular updates and consultations must be part of the project's life cycle.

3. Are there other issues or concerns related to this matter?

Yes, several other issues and concerns need to be addressed:

a. Long-term Sustainability: The long-term sustainability of the project must be scrutinized. Given the rapid advancements in renewable energy technology, the relevance and efficiency of traditional transmission lines may diminish over time. Investing in more sustainable and future-proof solutions must be prioritized.

b. Impact on Local Economy: The construction and presence of a transmission line will impact the local economy, particularly if it damages agricultural land or detracts from the area's attractiveness for tourism or new residents. The economic implications need careful consideration to ensure the project does not adversely affect local businesses and employment opportunities.

c. Legal and Regulatory Compliance: The project must comply with all relevant legal and regulatory requirements. Any lapses in compliance will lead to legal challenges, further delays, and additional costs, which could ultimately render the project unviable.

d. Technological Advancements: As technology evolves, alternative methods of power transmission and distribution may become available. The Commission should remain open to adopting newer, more efficient technologies that could mitigate the need for large-scale transmission projects.

e. Commissioner Accountability: Given concerns over potential violations of their oath to impartially serve the public (Minnesota Statute 216A.03, Subd. 4), consider the resignation of commissioners involved in decision-making favoring the power company's interests over public welfare. This accountability measure is essential to mitigate the adverse impacts and ensure fairness in the decision-making process regarding this and future projects.

4. Conclusion

In summary, the Commission should unequivocally deny the certificate of need for the Minnesota Energy Connection Project. The risks and concerns raised by the community—spanning environmental, health, property, economic, and technological considerations—are too significant to ignore. The overwhelming public opposition, coupled with the Commission's duty to prioritize public welfare over corporate interests, must guide their decision. Granting approval would not only disregard the community's staggering objection, but also undermine the Commission's sworn obligation to serve impartially and with integrity. Therefore, in the best interest of the affected community and in adherence to regulatory responsibility, the Commission must reject the proposal outright.

Sincerely,

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