

# PPL presents high voltage power line plan in Springtown

## *Line would affect Richland and Springfield properties*

*Heather Radick*

Residents packed the Springtown Volunteer Fire Company's Hall Feb 19 for an orderly but charged meeting to hear PPL's presentation on a new power line and substation proposed to run largely through Springfield Township.

In addition to Springfield Township residents, people from Buckingham, Haycock, Richland, Tinicum, Upper and Lower Saucon townships and Berks County were present. This was the first public meeting PPL held for Springfield Township and its residents since the power company began planning the upgrade about four years ago.

PPL Regional Community Relations Director Kathy Frazier explained where and why the proposed high voltage lines and substation would be built. Frazier stated that because of current and future power demands, the 80-year-old single circuit 69,000 volt transmission line needs to be replaced to handle up to 138,000 volts.

The first phase of the project is the construction of the transmission line. For these high voltage lines, PPL has chosen the "cross country route." The proposed seven-mile course would run from Coopersburg through Springfield and Richland townships, ending in Quakertown.

A route running along unused SEPTA lines and one along Route 309 are PPL's alternate routes. Despite opposition, Frazier stated that the preferred route is the shortest. It impacts the least amount of property owners, has the fewest number of poles, the least amount of tree clearing and has the lowest cost.

"This is the best route, and we believe that very strongly," said Frazier. "We understand that building a project like this can be controversial. I want to let you know we have listened to the input given and have taken it into consideration, and we have made our decision."

In the second phase of the proposal, a substation, about seven acres in size would be built on an 85-acre parcel on Hickon Road in Springfield and Richland townships, which the power company has already purchased. Frazier stated that the line upgrade is critical, and if no changes are made there will be a reliability problem.

The proposal will affect 50,000 utility customers. PPL would like to see the new line in operation by May 2009. The



*Residents listen to PPL representatives discuss plans for a 7-mile transmission line and a 7-acre substation proposed to cut through private properties in Springfield and Richland townships.*

substation is scheduled to be in operation by 2011.

Springfield Township residents Anthony Torlish and Todd Hemmert let PPL representatives know their concerns about electromagnetic field waves and their effects on human health. Hemmert, a Hickon Road resident, said there is a correlation between childhood leukemia and EMFs. He expressed concern over his 3-year-old son's health.

Keller Road resident Torlish stated that as a person who has been living near high voltage power lines for 20 years, he reads up on what EMFs can do to a person.

"Come over my house, I'll get a fluorescent light bulb and we'll walk under my power line, I'll hold it up, and you can read your paper and that is no lie," said Torlish.

Frazier stated that PPL is concerned with the safety and health of customers. She said that there is large body of evidence that EMFs do not harm humans. She explained that if it is determined through further studies that EMFs are harmful, they will take action.

Residents also spoke out about maintenance issues they are having with current PPL lines running on or adjacent to their properties. One Salem Road resident, Amy Humphreys, noted the property damage she has been incurring over the years and lack of response from the power company.

"If we cause any damage, we will come back and fix it," Frazier responded.

Expressing concerns over property values, Buckwampum Road resident Karl Schwartz stated that according to a study in the Journal of Real Estate Research, homes situated adjacent to or within sight of power lines sell for about

10 percent less than comparable houses located elsewhere.

Frazier responded that there is a slight dip temporarily in property value but there is no long term impact for homes located near electrical facilities. She stated that PPL does negotiate with property owners for the use of their land and they are compensated fairly.

Rocky Valley Road resident Walter Weaver said that he and his brother own a 43-acre parcel that PPL plans to access. Weaver announced that PPL offered him only \$8,000 for about five acres of his land.

"You're telling me that you're working with the landowners?" said Weaver. "I don't think so. It isn't right that landowners get squat."

Hickon Road resident Jack Emmert expressed his disapproval at PPL's choice of the transmission line course.

"You people are here for the shortest and cheapest route. This line is going to affect these people for the rest of their lives; their property, their kids, everything," said Emmert.

Supervisor Barbara Lindtner was concerned that although PPL previously met with two former Springfield employees, the township was not included, and this meeting was the first opportunity for the township's board of supervisors and the public to meet with PPL.

"We are your customers, and constituents as well, and we'll be responsible for footing the bill," said Lindtner. "So why not give us an opportunity to really weigh in on this?"

Lindtner asked PPL representatives what it would cost to use the existing 309 route on a per subscriber basis.

"The PUC wants costs in the siting application, and will consider those

costs in the making the decision ultimately on where to put this line," responded PPL siting supervisor Ken Kuhns.

PPL filed an application on Feb. 14 with the Public Utilities Commission to build the power line. Springfield Township Solicitor Scott MacNair explained that a public hearing will be held at which PPL will need to establish

to the PUC the present and future necessity of the proposed line.

The power company will also be required to show the safety of the line, and demonstrate any efforts made to minimize impact to areas such as wilderness, land use, hydrology, and historic areas. It will also have to show the availability of reasonable alternative routes.

After the PUC issues a hearing date,

the notice will be advertised twice in a newspaper of general circulation at least 45 days before the actual hearing and will also be listed on Springfield Township's web site. MacNair explained that the township and individuals can intervene and go before the PUC with their own evidence. PPL's impact assessment can be found at [springfield-bucks.org](http://springfield-bucks.org).