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| DOCKET NO. 190 - An application by PDC - El Paso Meriden LLC for a Certificate of Environmental Compatibility and Public Need for the construction, maintenance, and operation of the proposed Meriden Power Project located in the City of Meriden and the Town of Berlin, Connecticut. | } } } } | Connecticut Siting Council April 27, 1999 |
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Dissenting Opinion

In this brave new world of deregulation the question of the public need for a new electric generating plant will be determined by the market, not a state agency. If the proposed plant is not built, Connecticut residents will not be without power. If there is an actual need for more power, the market will respond, and another power plant will be built somewhere by someone, here in Connecticut or elsewhere. Unlike a certain baseball movie “if it is built, they may not come!” The market risk of overbuilding power plants is on the proponents; but the environmental risks are on the public. That being so, the Council should be very selective in siting a plant of uncertain need that is by its very nature environmentally unfriendly.

The applicant asks us to site its proposed facility near the top of Cathole Mountain, which is defined by the Conservation and Development Policies Plan for Connecticut 1998-2003 as a Conservation Area. This designation has been placed on this area because it is a traprock ridge and, additionally, is viewed as a resource corridor or greenway.

The exhaust from the proposed facility would be vented by two 180 foot stacks, which along with other structural features such as the generating building and cooling tower will be visually conspicuous. While the facility is partially screened from the adjacent residential neighborhood, the facility will be a distant visual feature for a large area.

The traprock ridge that would host the proposed facility has been disturbed by past logging and quarrying activity. Nevertheless, the parcel remains a cohesive ecological unit that possesses highly variable topography and is relatively pristine in terms of vegetation, species diversity and a lack of invasive species. The parcel contains three vertebrate species of special concern and three plant species of special concern that are listed on the Connecticut Natural Diversity Data Base. In addition, the site would adversely impact a listed sedge as well as birds which require a large forest canopy expanse.

The direct impact of inserting a 36 acre generating facility and utility corridor (150’ x 6,000’ plus) along the axis of this traprock ridge would be significant. The indirect impact may actually be more disruptive, however, because fragmentation of the parcel will negatively affect the flora and fauna within the parcel.

Approximately 700 acres of the 821 acre parcel owned by the applicant would be conveyed to the City of Meriden and the Town of Berlin. Approximately 100 acres of the land transferred to the municipalities will be subject to restrictions but the remaining 600 plus acres will not be so restricted with development remaining a district possibility. The preservation of all 700 acres

would have secured the ecological attributes of the entire parcel. Were this part of the Council's decision, our opinion might have been different.

To cool the plant, the applicant has selected a water cooled system and to operate that system, the applicant proposes to acquire a new right-of-way that would be over 10 miles in length, and to divert water from the Connecticut River. This proposed pipeline right-of-way is still only conceptual in nature, but would apparently have to cross several watercourses and wetlands and other potentially sensitive areas (lower foothills of Lamentation Mountain) all without the right of eminent domain!

The applicant has selected disturbed portions of the parcel for development and proposes to the transfer undeveloped acreage to the municipalities of Meriden and Berlin. While the donation of such acreage is commendable, not only is the land to be transferred largely without restriction on development, such a donation evades the basic question before this Council. Is this site an appropriate location for the proposed facility? There are already at least 12 gas fired generating plants on the drawing board just in Connecticut, and there will undoubtedly be more. Five applications for such plants have been filed with the Council in the past six months. Where should these plants go? Should we accept marginal sites? Aren't there alternative sites which would be less environmentally degrading? Can't we do better?

To ask these questions is to answer them. This application should be denied.

Brian Emerick
Colin C. Tait