

# Judge recommends cross country transmission line

## *Route runs through fields in Springfield and Richland*

**Rose Strong**

Scott Douglas, chairman of the Springfield Environmental Action Committee, said the PUC decision was “a bitter pill to swallow.”

However, the local community will continue its fight against a cross country power line route.

Administrative Law Judge, Angela T. Jones to the Public Utility Commission recommended that the cross country route that PPL Corporation has proposed through Springfield and Richland townships should be allowed.

The utility company proposed nearly 18 months ago to place a 6-acre substation on an 82-acre property it purchased several years ago at Hickon Road in Springfield Township.

Along with the substation it has proposed a right-of-way that cuts a 7-mile swath across both Richland and Springfield Township properties.

In February 2008, PPL filed its application with the PUC to run new power lines and place the substation in Springfield Township. That same month, the township hosted PPL at a public meeting with nearly 150 people in attendance to hear the full story of the planned route and give input.

On March 28, Springfield Township filed as an official intervener in the case. Suggesting two other routes, the township felt either would be a better choice than the cross country route. One is through the old SEPTA route that is no longer in service and the other, an existing route along the

Route 309 corridor.

Sen. Rob Wonderling also signed on as an intervener and Rep. Paul Clymer has taken a strong role as the people’s voice.

The Springfield Township Board of Supervisors made the decision to challenge the route, citing evidence through experts that included Ann Fowler Rhoads, senior botanist of the Pennsylvania Flora Project at the University of Pennsylvania’s Morris Arboretum, C. Robert Wynn, Springfield Township engineer, environmental engineer Mark Gallagher, vice president of Princeton Hydro and electrical engineer Peter Lanzalotta, principal of Lanzalotta and Associates.

Through the year there have been many meetings and hearings. One hearing was held in May in Harrisburg, open to the public. The grassroots group organized help to fight the cause, Springfield bucks Undesirable Land Use [SbULU] made the trip to visit with both Wonderling and Clymer. Several people from SbULU joined Supervisor Barbara Lindner at the hearing.

Judge Jones officiated at four public hearings in June. Two held in Springfield and two in Richland township. According to the report those hearings produced 456 pages of transcript from over 60 witnesses.

On Aug. 12, the judge toured the three routes.

Evidentiary hearings were held Nov. 6, 7 and 10 in Philadelphia with testimony by experts and interveners.

In a statement on behalf of the Springfield Township Board of Supervisors, township Manager Richard Schilling said, “The supervisors were disappointed and feel that the environmental impact meant absolutely nothing to the judge. They voted to have Scott Rubin file exceptions to the PUC on the administrative judge’s Decision. We are moving forward in the fight and feel confident that the hearing before the DEP will be a war.”

Chairperson James Brownlow expressed the same disappointment: “This judge discounted everything on the environment. With the history PPL has in not taking a stand on the environment we are not confident they will change.”

When approached about where the township may take this should the PUC approve, Brownlow stated, “We are taking this one step at a time. We don’t believe in the cross country route, although it might, and I emphasize the word might, be less expensive and least invasive. Spraying herbicides on the right of ways to keep them clear isn’t environmentally sound.”

Brownlow also indicated that the Department of Environmental Protection and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers have not approved of the plan and PPL will still need to get permits from them for crossing the Tohickon.

“We are all disappointed and bewildered by Judge Jones’ decision on any of the points,” says Karl Schwartz of (SbULU). “We



**Photographs by Karl Schwartz**

feel the township’s position in this matter was reasonable. PPL arbitrarily purchased the property and is the basis of everything that connects to it, making this the rationale for the purchase.

Schwartz joined SbULU based on what he’s seen happen in other rural areas.

“Staten Island, where I’m from used to be a rural area. The impact needs to balance between rural and urban,” he says.

Experts cite that the location for the substation is in the middle of fragile wetlands and the Tohickon Watershed headwaters would be subject to possible degradation from waste water, herbicide use and storm water run-off.

Endangered species of flora and fauna would be subject to habitat damage and although PPL states this is the most inexpensive route

and wouldn’t burden their customers, overall, the damage and possible clean up to the environment would be detrimental in the future, elevating rates for the consumer to burden.

The administrative law judge recommends that PPL may exercise the power of eminent domain for all those homeowners who testified and also recommends the dismissal of all environmental evidence as presented. The judge also dismisses the protests of Springfield and Richland townships as well as that of Sen. Wonderling, SEPTA and Liberty Home Development Corporation.

Brownlow indicated that as soon as he received the text of the judge’s report, it would be appropriate to place on the Springfield Township web site.

Check [springfieldbucks.org](http://springfieldbucks.org).