

The Recorder

IN THE COMMUNITY, ABOUT THE COMMUNITY, SINCE 1877.

2017-03-30 / Top News

Dominion has no handle on karst, landowners say

By Anne Adams • Staff Writer

DEERFIELD — At the historic farm owned by Bob and Robbie Koontz, the underlying karst features have been tough to document.

Dominion Resources, which plans to build its proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline across the property, still has little solid information on the ground it expects to excavate, the Koontzes say.

The couple hired a karst expert, who provided some visual information to Dominion on March 20. The next day, Mrs. Koontz said, “Dominion’s geologist and his son showed up at our garage ... unannounced. We were not notified that a geologist would be coming and we did not allow vehicles on the property. So, Bob asked him to leave.”

However, her husband then called the couple’s attorney, who felt it would be OK to allow the geologist on the property if he abided their wishes. The geologist returned the following day. His name is Robert K. “Bob” Denton of GeoConcepts Engineering Inc., hired by Dominion, Mrs. Koontz explained.

“Our geologist knows him quite well and thinks he will not make a false report about our geology,” she added. “But I seriously doubt any paid expert of Dominion will go against them in any way. They might privately advise Dominion that it would be a huge risk to build across our karst, which is what we have been told by our geologist, but he would not go public with this.”

The couple believes Dominion knows many of the karst maps it uses are wrong. “This was confirmed to us by the Virginia state geologist,” Mrs. Koontz said. “But I do not see any huge recall or redo on the part of the state or Dominion to be correct about karst. This is a huge issue in my opinion. The incorrect maps give Dominion license to plow forward over karst and ignore the issues.”

This issue, among many others, have given the Koontzes little reason to trust the company. “I have a heightened awareness of what Dominion is capable of doing and actually plans to do,” Mrs. Koontz said.

After meeting with one of the company's representatives, she said, "I now totally believe that Dominion is even willing to risk catastrophic events to get what they want with the ACP. He was awful. His face showed his anger and contempt at us. He paid no attention to us and showed no interest in what we had to say. His face froze when I mentioned several things Dominion was doing to us and the harm it was causing. He acknowledged nothing. He did not even turn his head when I pointed to the ruins of the 1797 kitchen, which are quite visible outside our big window where we were meeting in the family room. And he has the decision-making authority over every change in the ACP route. He can do it alone. Obviously, he will make no concessions to people like us," she said.

Mr. and Mrs. Koontz were alarmed by a recent full-page ad in the Wall Street Journal about power company PG&E and a pipeline explosion in 2010 "and all the improvements they made to avoid this again," Mrs. Koontz said. "The cause was an improper welding in a seam in the pipeline. Seven years to identify improvements? Most improvements identified were quite soft like 'verify, review' and not specific clear and hard changes such as welding procedures and automatic detection methods. Eight people killed and a community devastated by the explosion ... So these things happen.

"But explosions in the ACP will not be accidents," she continued. "Explosions will occur because Dominion ignored everything except installing the pipeline according to them and nothing else — even safety. After all, they will not be living in the blast zone. And they care absolutely nothing about the environment, history, financial impact, etc. Destruction of endangered species and water resources will not be accidents — not now or in the future, because once done, the ACP will always be here in Virginia and causing destruction. They care nothing about the financial impact on the landowners or residents of Bath and all of Virginia," she said.

Their karst expert has documented at least three karst springs too close to, or in the path of the pipeline route, she explained. "He also believes the ridge behind our house could be a series of caves. He has identified one spot that he believes is 98 percent chance of being a cave. He plans to bring a team out to dig open the cave in the very near future. He is quite excited about the prospect of having a series of caves in this area because none are known," she said.