

Dominion needs to talk to gain trust

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In a Thursday visit with The News Leader editorial board, Dominion Transmission Inc. officials stressed the need to talk to landowners whose property sits on the proposed route for the Atlantic Coast Pipeline.

Dominion wants to know the specifics of each property – for example where sinkholes are or where water stands after storms – and has changed the route based on some landowners' requests.

The company says it is bound by law and ethics not to do anything that would dry a well or harm water supply. In one instance, they say they re-routed to avoid a large sugar maple operation.

At this time, the proposed route is constantly changing, to avoid safety and environmental issues and to accommodate requests.

We find requests to survey reasonable. It is possible that land being surveyed will not be used in the final route. The best way for landowners to get off the route is to meet with Dominion for a survey and demonstrate why their property shouldn't be included.

Dominion says about 70 percent of landowners along the route have agreed to surveys. In Augusta County, that figure drops to about 50 percent.

Unfortunately state law allows Dominion to survey without landowners' permission or input.

Consider the case of William Little of Churchville. In August, Dominion notified Little and his wife Wendy that their land is on the pipeline study corridor.

As is his right, Little responded with a registered letter saying "no trespassing" by Dominion will be tolerated. On Oct. 10 — four days after signing for Little's letter — Dominion mailed him a notice saying surveying on his land will begin Oct. 27 or later.

This undermines Dominion's urging landowners to talk. It breeds mistrust.

Little filed a suit Thursday challenging the state law that allows surveying on his land without his permission.

Talking things over is best for all parties involved. If Dominion wants to be trusted, they'll have to show some restraint on sending out the notices of "Intent to Enter Property."

Our View represents the majority opinion of the newspaper's editorial board, Roger Watson, president and publisher; David Fritz, executive editor; and Deona Landes Houff, community conversations editor.