

Notes on August 12 County BOS meeting on Southeast Reliability Project

Lewis Freeman <lewfreeman@gmail.com>

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To:

The turnout was impressive. The Nelson Middle School auditorium was full, so I'd guess there were 500-600 people in attendance, maybe even more. A good portion (20-25%) wore distinctive blue tee shirts that said in bold white letters: NO PIPELINE. I'll send you separately a couple of pictures I took with my phone, one of the auditorium crowd, another of the demonstrators outside the school as people arrived.

But I took notes, so here's a quick rundown of highlights and impressions:

1. The Dominion presentation was done by Chet Wade and Emmett Toms, as in Highland. The same sidemen/women were there, plus 2 or 3 others. Almost enough for a baseball team, but as before, they'd struggle even in a Class A League.
2. The presentation ran 36 minutes, with 21 of them used by Chet Wade during the set-up and extolling portion. Thus, 15 minutes was devoted by Toms to the specifics of the projects.
3. The noticeable differences from the Highland presentation were that they said: a) the trench is to be 9-10 feet deep, not the 10-12 mentioned in Highland; b) the trench must be no closer to wells and springs than 150 feet, rather than the 200 feet mentioned in Highland.
4. The Supervisors took an hour to ask lots of questions, with follow-ups on many. They used many that were submitted by Friends of Nelson, but they also demonstrated that they had done their homework. It was a decidedly engaged BOS.
5. Several questions by BOS on where Dom. would get water to test the pipeline and how much would be needed, as well as where and how the water would it be disposed of at the end of the line or section of line being tested. Dom. generally responded that the company couldn't say until it had determined where the route was, etc. This response was met unfavorably by BOS and particularly by the audience.
6. When asked how close to homes the pipeline might be, Dom. responded with the same "25 feet" figure used in the Highland briefing, explaining that this is what the law requires. During a follow-up question, Dom later corrected that by saying that since the permanent right a way would be 75 feet, the proximity to a home would be 75 feet. Nancy Sorrells (Augusta County Alliance and Shenandoah Valley Network) observed to me afterwards that it was really 37.5 feet (half of 75). In all, the Dom. response on this point was not well received. Then again, not much of what the

company spokespersons said on anything was well received by anyone, including the Supervisors.

7. Asked if Dom. would provide funds for mitigation, should harm be done to affected ecology, the company responded that determining possible mitigation measures was "part of the process" and an answer to the question could not be provided at this time.

8. Dom. said it "would know in September" how much personal property tax it would be paying to Nelson County for the pipeline.

9. When one Supervisor observed that the proposed route of the pipeline went through some of the most rugged Nelson County terrain that could have been chosen, thus making it more difficult to build the pipeline, a Dom. spokesperson responded: "Yes, we know that." Duh!

10. Dom. during Q&A said it had changed the route in Augusta County, and some small changes in Nelson, to avoid some ecologically sensitive areas or environmental easements that had brought to its attention. Interesting response, given that some believe the latest changes in Augusta are even more harmful to the ecology.

11. Dom responded to a question on local erosion and sediment control requirements by saying it would have to comply with all local, state and federal regulations on such matters. This is a variation of that mantra out of Richmond: "We'll work with you." This is right up there with: "Give us your tired and your poor" and "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

12. When asked if the company would provide "free water to any property owners whose water supply is contaminated by pipeline construction, Dom. responded: "We'll evaluate that." West Virginia's recent unpleasant experience with that no doubt helped prompt that question.

13. What about earthquakes, since there was a significant one that affected Nelson County n 2011? "We'll evaluate that."

14. There was a question about the impact of the project - during construction and afterwards - on local emergency responder capabilities. Dom. responded "we'll work with local authorities to organize training and help out." (Emphasis added)

15. A Supervisor asked about the odds of the pipeline going through Nelson County. This question brought more applause than any other point of the evening. Chet Wade said he couldn't say, but once again stated how interested were some of the company's potential customers for the gas that would be transmitted through the pipeline. This conjured up the Black Friday image of people trampling over other customers to get to the sale on ladies underwear. We're the other customers; Duke and Piedmont Energy represent ladies underwear.

16. A question was asked about the reported effects of a pipeline on mortgage and homeowner insurance availability and rates. Dom. spokesperson (I believe it was Brittany) said that in all her many years with the company she had "never heard of that situation being raised." Chet added that with 300,000 miles of natural gas pipeline in the country, he was unaware of any instances where that had been a problem.

17. I stayed for about 30 minutes of comments from the public (they were still continuing at 9:20 pm when I left. All speakers I heard were vociferously against the project. The most noteworthy one, though, was the first speaker, who said he was a cattle farmer in Nelson, but used to be a communications executive in Nebraska. He said that as a businessman he knew that stockholders expected a company in which they invested to use the most cost-effective ways to make their product or provide their service. He observed that the route being proposed by Dom. could not possibly be the most cost-effective route, given the many difficulties that had been identified that evening, and went on to say that an alternative route should be considered. I think this line of thinking - cost-effectiveness - is one that can and should be used in future communications with Dom. executives in Richmond and outside directors. Particularly, outside directors.

18. In a similar vein, the last public commenter I heard announced he made his living in the construction business, building homes. He said that his years in the construction business had taught him 3 rules: 1) the cost of a project will always be twice big as originally envisioned; 2) the time to complete the project will be twice as long as predicted, and 3) most projects, particularly one this big, will be "fraught with problems" beyond those originally imagined. As his allotted 3 minutes ran out, he concluded that he thought Dominion, in approaching this project, was "doing everything ass-backward."

That would be my conclusion, as well.

- Lew

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