

## **Richmond Times-Dispatch**

# **Dominion should return property to owners**

Aug 13, 2021

Editor, Times-Dispatch:

On July 5, 2020, when Dominion Energy announced that it was abandoning the Atlantic Coast Pipeline (ACP) project, many people assumed the six-year struggle was over. However, for the majority of landowners on the pipeline's path, the struggle continues because of the easements Dominion extracted from them — thanks to the power of eminent domain — which was granted by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC).

ACP acquired two kinds of easements: permanent and temporary. Dominion plans to retain all of the permanent easements indefinitely, although it has offered no explanation of why doing so serves the public good. The easements prohibit property owners from using that portion of their land for building permanent structures, planting trees and other restricted activities. Landowners who want to sell property that is encumbered by these easements can expect fewer and lower bids.

Temporary easements were intended to be used only during pipeline construction. Dominion plans to retain the temporary easements for at least another three to five years, until all properties damaged by ACP's abandoned project have been restored. (That damage occurred because FERC customarily has allowed pipeline builders to start work even though

all the necessary permits have not been secured.) Despite the fact that there was no tree felling, earth moving or other construction impacts along 376 miles of the 600-mile route of the ACP, Dominion refuses to immediately release the temporary easements on those undisturbed properties. This is unacceptable.

FERC issued the lynchpin permit giving Dominion permission to condemn private property for public “convenience and necessity.” This justification became null and void when the pipeline was canceled. Now it’s time for FERC to push Dominion to release the unnecessary easements and give affected landowners the relief they deserve.

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