

DeFelice family

continued from cover

to move here and do this. We were planning on living here for the rest of our lives," said Tasha. "We moved here in October [2013], and we found out the night we moved here that there were these town meetings."

The DeFelicis started attending the meetings — forums hosted by the Town of Milan Board to keep residents informed about the proposed project — and shared their story. Council Member Marion

Power line developers agree to modify proposals

by Danielle Fried

Another bit of encouraging news has come out of the case involving the proposed construction of high-voltage power lines to resolve an identified transmission bottleneck between Leeds and Pleasant Valley.

On Feb. 27, during a phone conference between administrative law judges (ALJ), developers and interested parties, all four developers agreed to rewrite their proposals to utilize existing rights-of-way to the maximum extent possible. No date has been set for submission of modified proposals.

In October 2013, the Public Service Commission (PSC) presented for public comment four project proposals outlining plans to relieve the bottleneck.

The phone conference follows the Feb. 20 PSC ruling that ordered the ALJ to establish a procedure for developers to modify their proposals to maximize use of existing rights-of-way. This development came in response to pressure put on the PSC to consider the many lives, farms, and businesses that would be profoundly affect-

ed by the construction of high-voltage power lines.

Projects staying within existing rights-of-way protect homes and land from seizure by eminent domain.

Director of Communications for Scenic Hudson Inc. Jay Burgess issued a press release on March 4 on behalf of the Hudson Valley Smart Energy Coalition. In the release, Scenic Hudson President Ned Sullivan is quoted: "This marks another positive step by the PSC; however, a dark cloud continues to hang over residential, business and farm properties along proposed routes. The PSC should quickly and definitively disqualify proposals that fail to meet the governor's criteria of staying within existing rights-of-way and solicit proposals for 21st-century alternatives to new transmission towers."

The Coalition defines themselves as "... municipal officials; environmental, historic and land preservation organizations; businesses; and residents who oppose outdated monster power lines and support creation of a modern, comprehensive energy plan for the Hudson Valley and New York State."

Mathison was moved to action.

"The DeFelice family is a human face on the serious damage already caused by the AC [alternating current] Transmission Line Upgrade project proposed by Governor Cuomo and the PSC [Public Service Commission]," said Mathison.

Mathison sent their story, along with pictures of the family, to US Senator Charles Schumer, and titled it "Tragic Impact of Proposed Power Lines Project on Milan's DeFelice Family." She invited them to speak at a Hudson Valley Smart Energy Coalition meeting.

Greg Quinn, spokesperson for Clinton Concerned Citizens, a Coalition member, heard their story.

"They had us all in tears," he said.

The Town of Milan has hosted several informational meetings, including forums where developers presented their proposals and answered questions. Project maps are available on the Department of Public Service website, www.dps.ny.gov.

The DeFelicis learned about the path of the proposed power lines by examining developer maps. Julia said in one proposal, her home was missing from the map.

"It was blackened out because it was right in the path of the power lines," she said. Julia, Tasha, Antonio and the couple's two young boys currently live in West Hurley, but Julia refers to her childhood home in Milan as "the homestead." As a single mom, she lived there during the summers, and her parents would watch her children when she was at work.

The DeFelicis know they could lose 150 feet of land on either side of the path of the proposed power lines, and the existing

home may be torn down. But uncertainty about exactly how much land they will lose and where, and whether the home will be gone, aren't the only sticking points for them; the other, is the fact that this would be the third set of power lines running through the property. Each time, the family was told the lines were necessary because the previous set was "getting old."

Not only have portions of land been taken, but privacy, as well. A line of trees separating the home from the road were cut down when the Iroquois pipeline was built.

"The fact is, the PSC has the power and authority to do this," said Tasha. "We're so afraid. What happens in 10 or 20 years? Are they going to tell us again, 'They're getting old. We need to build new ones.' How many power lines are we going to live next to?"

Julia sees the proposed project as not only a personal crisis, but also a decision that affects national security. High-voltage power lines are fed by large, transformer substations that, if attacked, could result in widespread, long-term power outages. The safety of the current power grid has been increasingly debated since the terrorist attack of 9-11 and Superstorm Sandy.

"My primary concern is: how intelligent of a decision is this? It's a terrorist's delight," she said. "When they put the other towers in, 9-11 did not happen yet. This is a different world today."

A decision about the proposed project can't come soon enough.

"It's earth-shaking for us. And gut-wrenching. And I don't know when it will be resolved. That's the worst thing," said Julia.

Coughlan calls for reinstatement of energy tax exemption

POUGHKEEPSIE—Dutchess County Comptroller Jim Coughlan, who is running for state senate in District 41, has kicked off an online petition drive to repeal what he calls the "Rolison Energy Tax" with a robo-call targeted to Republican, Conservative and Independent voters of the 41st Senate District.

The County Legislature, under Rolison's chairmanship, voted to repeal the 3.75 percent sales tax exemption on home energy sources. Rolison has been designated by the County Republican Committee as its candidate to face incumbent Sen. Terry Gipson. Coughlan can still mount a primary challenge.

The tax on all energy forms, including

electricity, took effect in Dutchess County March 1. The tax has quickly become a contentious issue with residents already struggling to keep up with skyrocketing energy prices.

In November, before entering the race for State Senate and prior to passage of the law, Coughlan wrote Rolison expressing his opposition to the tax. In his letter, Coughlan voiced the concern that our "seniors and those residents on fixed incomes simply cannot afford the additional burden."

Coughlan is calling for Dutchess County residents to sign his petition calling for reinstatement of the exemption. To sign the petition, visit jimcoughlan.com.

Local legislators support state bill to strip pensions from convicted officials

by Kate Goldsmith

ALBANY—Sen. Terry Gipson (D-Dutchess, Putnam) is part of a bipartisan coalition of New York State Senators and Assembly members who support legislation (S.1133/ A.7173) that would strip pension benefits from public officials convicted of a felony in violation of the public trust.

"Taxpayers deserve accountability in the conduct of their state officials. New York State's history proves there has been a serious lack of such accountability, and as newly elected State Senator I believe we need change," said Gipson. "This is common sense, good government legislation."

Currently there are no laws in New York State regarding the forfeiture of pension benefits by a state officer or local officer

who has been convicted of a crime. This legislation would amend New York State's constitution to provide that any state officer or local officer convicted of a felony involving breach of public trust be subject to forfeiture of pension benefits.

Republican Kieran Lalor of the 105th District and Democrat Frank Skartados of the 104th District are listed as co-sponsors of the Assembly bill, according to the Assembly website (<http://assembly.state.ny.us>); go to Bill Search & Legislative Information, then type in A.7173).

Democratic Assembly member Didi Barrett of the 106th District recently cosponsored the bill, according to Nick Melson, her chief of staff; although Barrett's name is not included as a co-sponsor on the web page for the legislation.

Gipson calls for expanded funding to fight tick-borne illness

State Sen. Terry Gipson (D-Dutchess, Putnam) urged New York State Department of Health Commissioner Dr. Nirav Shah to expand funding in the Department of Health's 2014/15 budget for Lyme and tick-borne illness research, education and outreach in a recent letter.

Gipson has introduced the TickRAID Act, S.5983, which would appropriate \$1 million to the Health Department's Tick Borne Disease Institute. Past funding has been cut by almost 50 percent over the past six years.

"It's unconscionable that as more families are impacted every day by Lyme and tick-borne illness in the Hudson Valley and across New York State, that funding has been cut in half," said Gipson. "We cannot sit back and wait on the federal government for funding. We must take responsibility as a state to address this rising health epidemic now."

In the letter, Gipson highlights the fact that the Tick-Borne Disease Institute has been under-funded and has experienced significant cuts from \$150,000 in 2008 to under \$70,000 in 2013, despite the fact that the spread of Lyme disease and tick-borne illnesses in New York State has been growing astronomically in the past few years. In August 2013, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) reported that there is at least 10 times the number of people affected with Lyme disease than was previously reported.

The TickRAID Act is being carried by Fred W. Thiele, Jr., (I, D, WF-Sag Harbor) in the Assembly. The legislation would provide the Tick-Borne Disease Institute the appropriate funding in order to provide grants for organizations in New York to execute proper research, detection, education and outreach efforts.

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