

Power lines dog newcomer

By Jonathan Edwards | Enterprise staff writer | June 27, 2009 23:37

Tamie LeBar moved to Davis a month ago with her partner and 5-month-old daughter for all the usual reasons: the fine schools, a welcoming community and a 'dream home' she found in El Macero Estates.

Forty-five days later, she's thinking of moving again.

LeBar escaped high-voltage power lines when she moved from the upscale Rancho Solano neighborhood in Fairfield. About 200 feet away, the 100- to 150-foot towers were an eyesore, they buzzed and she was worried about the questionable health effects of their electromagnetic radiation.

If the Transmission Agency of Northern California gets its way, the ominous, metallic towers might follow LeBar to Davis. The agency, also known as TANC, would need them to run some 600 miles of high-voltage power lines, connecting renewable energy sources in Lassen County to consumers in the Bay Area and Central Valley.

TANC is a conglomerate of 15 public agencies, including the Sacramento Municipal Utility District and the cities of Roseville, Santa Clara and Lodi.

'This is our dream home. This is our dream neighborhood. This is where we want to be in the long haul,' LeBar said. '(But) if they do this, we'll seriously consider leaving.'

Representatives from the agency will outline the project to the Yolo County Board of Supervisors at its meeting Tuesday. The presentation is scheduled for 3 p.m. at the County Administration Building, 625 Court St. in Woodland.

The agency is considering three north-south routes, all of them cutting through Yolo County. The central option brushes up against the eastern side of South Davis, including LeBar's new home in El Macero Estates.

An eastern route enters the county near Clarksburg and heads through the Yolo Bypass, including the Vic Fazio Yolo Wildlife Area. A third possibility starts near Clarksburg, heads west into Solano County before swinging around Winters and heading north along the Blue Ridge mountains.

It could be a rough crowd Tuesday. Yolo County has already sent two letters to TANC outlining 'adverse and unavoidable impacts' to agriculture, the environment and flood protection. The Davis City Council also sent a letter in April, calling on the agency to kill the central route.

Supervisor Jim Provenza of Davis said he's all for green energy, lower emissions and a stronger electrical grid, but 'just using the term 'renewable energy' doesn't make it a good project.'

TANC has yet to prove the project is cost-effective and environmentally friendly, Provenza said, pointing to a report released earlier this year by the state Department of Energy. Lassen County ranks low on statewide options for renewable energy, the report states, saying its projects come with relatively high costs and have a high impact on the environment.

'There are many questions as to whether this project makes sense at all,' Provenza said, 'but we want to give them a chance to explain.'

At a meeting in Davis earlier this month, TANC's general manager, Jim Beck, said most of the big-time renewable energy sources are in Southern California. Running power lines down there would cost too much. And with utilities across the state scrambling to meet state-mandated benchmarks for renewable energy, competition with southern energy companies would be fierce.

Provenza said he's yet to see the proof: 'They haven't presented any convincing evidence.'

The county wants TANC to scrap all three routes and start from scratch, this time with input from local government. But it's hedging in case that doesn't happen. Yolo County's lawyers are drafting an ordinance that would give the board a say before any route is built. TANC's board of directors could override the Yolo's supervisors, but the county could answer with a lawsuit, throwing the whole mess into court.

LeBar will have to sweat it out, wondering if she'll have to uproot.

'I wouldn't have moved here (if there had been power lines),' she said. 'I would have gone to another part of Davis or a neighboring town.'

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