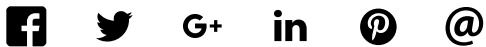


https://www.times-news.com/news/local_news/developer-proposing-hydroelectric-plant-in-grant/article_3399794a-d43c-57bc-899d-be9f81313a25.html

Developer proposing hydroelectric plant in Grant

Lindsay Renner-Wood lrenner-wood@times-news.com

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BISMARCK, W.Va. — As a hydroelectric power project attempts to get off the ground for the third time, some residents of the surrounding area say they're concerned about whether the developer has been forthright with them.

For the last three to four years, Tim Williamson of FreedomWorks LLC, has been shopping around for a home for the Ulysses Pump Storage Hydro Project. Williamson said the first attempt to build the plant in Grant County failed, so he attempted to locate the project in Tucker County. That fell through as well following a March 2019 decision from the U.S. Forest Service, which expressed concerns about the proposed project's effects on wildlife and vegetation in the Monongahela National Forest.

Now, Williamson is trying again to get the project underway again in the Falls and Bismarck communities of Grant County. He is making a third attempt at securing the necessary permits from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, and is lobbying state and local authorities to begin the requisite studies.

According to the preliminary permit application for the project found on the FreedomWorks website, the proposed 4-gigawatt hydroelectric power plant would consist of “as many as eight pumping/generating units contained in as many as one powerhouse,” a 1,042-acre upper reservoir and an 1,139 acre lower reservoir. All points would be connected by “a 500-kilovolt direct interconnection that transmits project power from the powerhouse to the one of three existing 500 kV transmission lines located directly above the powerhouse” and three penstocks.

The site would also feature emergency spillways that, per the application, do not yet have a proposed location.

Williamson, of Harpers Ferry, said that West Virginia is uniquely suited to the proposed renewable energy project, and could stand to benefit from it uniquely as well. He said he met with the Grant County Commission Feb. 11 to introduce the project, and at that time got the body’s blessing to begin contacting the residents who’d be affected by the plant’s construction, should it come to fruition.

The support of the public, Williamson said, is vital. Per the application, “Both the upper and lower reservoir areas are currently privately held lands, owned by 54 separate parties (33 each at upper reservoir; 21 each at lower reservoir).”

“By all means, I’m not doing anything without public support,” Williamson told the Times-News Monday when contacted by telephone. “It just can’t happen. That’s why I keep moving the project, because I don’t have the right conditions.”

One resident, however, feels Williamson hasn’t been entirely straightforward when approaching the landowners about the project.

Scherr resident Debbie Kunkel said she and more than 30 other locals convened a meeting Sunday to discuss their concerns about the project. They are concerned, Kunkel said, about the environmental effects that construction could have in the area. Kunkel said she’d been unaware of the project before Williamson’s meeting with the county commission earlier in the month.

When the Corridor H highway was under construction, Kunkel recalled, residents who rely on well water had to have their wells redug due to contamination concerns.

“And that was just surface,” Kunkel said of the construction required for that road, “and now they’re talking about going below the strata.”

Kunkel said Williamson is also not accepting negative responses from landowners, as he’d said he would.

“He keeps saying if one landowner says no the project is dead,” Kunkel said. “But as he calls these different landowners ... he says, ‘Oh, I can shift this over and it won’t affect you,’ and that’s what he’s telling everyone individually. He’s not accepting their no. ... How much is this guy fooling us with what he’s saying? His job is to get it in gear.”

Williamson said he’s yet to meet in person with any of the residents, including Kunkel. He’s contacted landowners by phone, he said, and has so far received much “constructive” feedback from the people with whom he’s spoken.

“I’m not accepting that I should go away yet just because one landowner might not want to be included,” Williamson said. “A responsible developer looks at all options before they give up.”

Kunkel said she and residents of the communities of Falls and Bismarck will meet with the Grant County Commission during their March 24 business meeting to share their concerns. A public meeting on the subject is also scheduled for 6 p.m. March 9 at the Grant County Courthouse.

Between now and the meeting later in March, Kunkel said she and the other residents will continue working together to form a strategy regarding how they’d like to proceed.

“Just because we’re not a metropolis doesn’t mean we’re not important,” Kunkel said. “It’s very distressing.”

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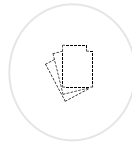
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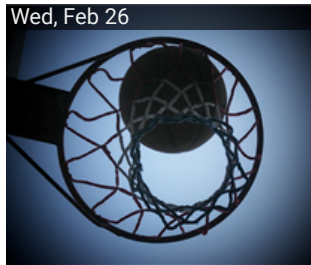
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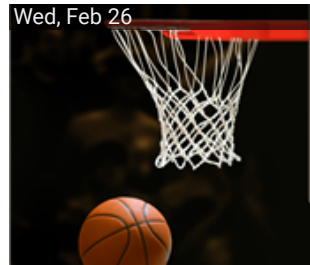
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