

# The Pueblo Chieftain

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## Black Hills Energy's Pueblo West transmission line given the greenlight

By Anthony A. Mestas

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The Pueblo County Commissioners unanimously approved Black Hills Energy's request to build a 115 kilovolt transmission line through Pueblo West, but there are conditions set, including the possibility of burying power lines.

Black Hills applied for a House Bill 1041 application that would allow for the construction of the Canon West Reliability Project — a 39-mile, single-circuit transmission line that would travel from the company's existing West Station Substation in Pueblo County into Fremont County.

John Vigil, senior program manager of community relations at Black Hills, said the company was blindsided by three new conditions presented by Commissioner Terry Hart Thursday during a meeting at the Sangre de Cristo Arts and Conference Center.

Vigil said the biggest concern is the underground proposal, but that each have to be evaluated.

Hart's condition is that underground line would be required anytime a new transmission line is within a half a mile of any existing residence or property upon which a residence can be built.

"We are pleased that they approved the line. We understand that there are conditions and we will fully evaluate those conditions and keep the impact to our customers in mind as we evaluate them," Vigil said.

Vigil said the underground line proposal has already been proven to be a substantial cost for the company and its customers.

Commissioner Chris Wiseman said that if Black Hills brings forward data showing that underground lines would cause a rate increase to customers that the condition in the permit would probably be amended.

"The last thing that I would want to see would be a rate increase," Wiseman said.

Vigil said the company would bring that issue to the commissioners.

The other conditions include a requirement of detailed plans submitted to the county dealing with any effort to mitigate the disruption to the floodplains as well as the plant life in the area as well as a plan for long-term maintenance in place that would cause the least amount of damage to the area including the topography of the area during the construction process.

Changes to the conditions would require an amendment to the permit. An amendment can be brought forward by county staff, the commissioners and Black Hills.

"I think the conditions give us the flexibility to push the limits if we need to," Wiseman said.

All three commissioners agreed that the project is needed.

"It's needed for the future growth of Pueblo West and the community and also the solar project that Black Hills is looking to do," Commissioner Garrison Ortiz said.

"It wasn't," Manrose said.

Manrose said the conditions are great as long as the commissioners apply them. He said too much emphasis has been placed on the cost of putting the power lines underground.

"Black Hill always puts a dollar amount on it. It's always contingent on dollar amount and nothing to do with health and safety and property values and stuff they are going to destroy if they don't go underground," Manrose said.

"We are optimistic to some extent, but the route that they still chose is just terrible. It's not designed for transmission lines. They are just destroying a floodplain if they go in there and don't handle it right."

Manrose said the only way for these conditions to be analyzed correctly is if Black Hills does not conduct studies.

"If they do an independent study — not Black Hills — I think that would be terrific," Manrose said.

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Ortiz said concerns heard by the community have weighed heavily on the decision to grant the permit as well as the 2018 decision to reject a similar Black Hills proposal.

Wiseman said the conditions keep the neighbors in the process.

Pueblo West citizens living along the Wild Horse Creek area who have been fighting the proposal were not happy with the decision to grant the proposal, but said they liked the conditions.

Melvin Manrose said the decision is better than what they thought it would be because of the conditions set in place.

"It's still disappointing that they (commissioners) violate their own rules and regulations... This can't be done without a vote of the people," Manrose said after the hearing.

Manrose said a right-of-way can't be expanded to the needed 125 feet unless it was done prior to May 8, 1977.