



Evergy companies

Informational Briefing on HB2317

**Presented by:
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For the House Committee on Energy, Utilities and Telecommunications

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Chairman Seiwert, Vice Chairman Schreiber, Ranking Minority Kuether and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information on House Bill 2317 as well as some background on Evergy's (Westar/KCP&L) policies and procedures when building or re-building transmission lines.

In 2016, Westar Energy began the process of rebuilding a 69kV transmission line in northeast Wichita near Wichita State University. This line was more than 50 years old and ready for replacement. It was part of enhancements to the electric grid in Wichita to improve reliability. We began contacting property owners and tenants in the area who would be directly impacted by construction. This included residents or tenants who would see a utility pole on their property or whose property existed on the path of the line. We also met with District 1 council members, District Advisory Board members, as well as homeowner/neighborhood associations. District Advisory Board meetings are open to the public, and the meetings about the transmission line were listed on the board's publicly disseminated agendas. We did not hold a stand-alone project meeting. Many times, when a transmission line is being rebuilt and the route is not changing, we find that attendance at such a meeting is minimal. We felt in this instance that direct contact with property owners and presenting at established public meetings was the best approach.

Early last summer, when the structures for the transmission line were being erected, we learned there was concern. We gathered information and a few weeks later met with a group of residents to listen and respond to those concerns. Following those meetings, Westar Energy made four commitments. Two were associated with the line being reconstructed at that time, and two with the next phase of the line rebuild.

First, Westar Energy would consider additional compensation for homeowners and tenants of homes with a transmission pole in their yard. Since then, we have completed meetings with all of these

homeowners and tenants and reached agreements. Most of the homeowners elected to stay in their homes. For the homes we purchased, we are working with local nonprofits to identify next steps.

Second, we convened a group of leaders from Wichita District 1 – members who live, work or serve the residents of District 1 – and asked them to recommend investments that would benefit the community as a whole. They have met several times over the last five months and have brought forward ideas that we look forward to setting in motion soon.

Third, Westar’s engineering team looked at the next phase of the project and have made changes that will reduce the footprint and visual impact of the line. For the next phase, we will rebuild it using primarily wooden poles and consider public easements in addition to private easements.

Fourth, a community meeting will be held before construction begins on the second phase of this transmission line. This will be in addition to the normal practice of meeting individually with the homeowners directly on the path of the line. We expect to schedule that meeting in summer or fall of this year.

Regarding House Bill 2317 – We are concerned that the parameters for when a utility would be required to obtain a siting permit and conduct a public meeting go beyond what is necessary to maintain the desired balance between informing those impacted and efficiently and affordably meeting project deadlines to ensure reliability. We would be grateful for the opportunity to work with the sponsors of HB2317 to explore solutions that do not necessarily involve a change in statute but that we believe could meet the intent of this legislation.

Westar is grateful for the patience and understanding of residents in the neighborhood where this transmission line is located. Their feedback has made a difference and has resulted in changes to how Evergy will approach communication in the future as we undertake the projects necessary to provide reliable electricity. As for residents of this northeast Wichita neighborhood, they can be assured we will continue working together, listening to their concerns and doing all we can to be good community partners for decades to come.

Thank you again, committee, for the opportunity today to provide information.

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