

New South Asheville Duke Energy substation to be online in 2018

Mike Cronin, mcronin@citizen-times.com 2:46 p.m. EDT March 30, 2016

The auxiliary power station is needed to meet the area's increasing power demands, Duke officials say.



(Photo: provided)

Duke Energy plans to begin construction of a substation early next year at the intersection of Mills Gap and Sweeten Creek Roads in South Asheville.

Because of increasing power demands of customers in that fast-growing area of Buncombe County, the Charlotte-based utility intends the substation to be online by November 2018, said Jason Walls, Duke's Asheville-area local government and community relations manager.

"We've reached the point where the system is no longer adequate to meet the demands of customers," Walls said. "The substation will serve the existing need and future growth."

Walls cited the emergence of Biltmore Park, the development along Hendersonville Road and the establishment of Gerber Village as examples of South Asheville's expansion – and increasing need for power.

News of the substation follows the December 2014 disclosure that Duke plans to build three substations that would serve power needs for downtown Asheville and nearby neighborhoods.

A substation is an auxiliary power station which, among other actions, converts electrical current and steps up or down voltage.

A 115-kilovolt power-transmission line stretching 1.8 miles will be built to connect Duke's existing Asheville Plant-Osteen West to the new substation, wrote Sarah Spagnola, a utility project manager, to local residents in a Feb. 3 letter obtained by the Citizen-Times.

"The new transmission line will be constructed in a 100 foot easement," Spagnola wrote.

Duke bought the South Asheville substation land in 2013 for about \$2.5 million, Walls said.

Plans outline that power lines will "be suspended on steel H-frame structures and steel single pole structures," Spagnola also wrote. "The average height of the above-ground structures will be approximately 60 to 105 feet."

The project will be "unsightly," said Jennifer Ruane, a real estate agent with Asheville Realty & Associates.

More importantly, Ruane said the substation proposal already has negatively affected homeowners in the area.

A potential buyer for a client's house "pulled out of a contract" a few days ago after learning of the substation, Ruane said. "It's unfortunate," she said.

The substation will lower property values and make it difficult for residents to sell their homes, she said.

Electricity rates for customers don't automatically increase because of the construction of substations, Walls said in December 2014.

That happens only "when revenues coming in are no longer sufficient to cover costs, Walls said. Increases typically aren't tied to projects as specific as substations, he said.

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