



Highlands Coalition commends Tewksbury residents who battled substation

By Lillian Shupe/Hunterdon County Democrat on October 25, 2013 at 1:37 PM

TEWKSBURY TWP. — The Friends of Fairmount Historic District received special recognition at the Oct. 9 annual meeting of the New Jersey Highlands Coalition for the battle the group waged against JCP&L's siting of an electrical substation.

In December 2008, after 16 hearings over the course of a year, the township Land Use Board rejected JCP&L's application to build the substation.

JCP&L appealed to the state Board of Public Utilities and in June 2009 that board ruled that JCP&L "had established by a preponderance of the evidence that the proposed substation is necessary for the service, convenience and welfare of the greater public that the company serves."

Residents opposed to the location of the substation formed the Friends of Fairmount Historic District and filed an appeal of the BPU's decision. The township later joined in on that appeal.

The court denied the Friends' motion for a stay pending the appeal, so construction began last year and was completed this summer.

The residents don't deny that a substation is needed in the general area — they just don't believe this particular location is the right spot for it. They argue that it is in an historic district, on a scenic road, contains a significant amount of wetlands and is in the Highlands preservation area.

The Highlands Coalition represents a diverse network of organizations; local ,regional and national; who have a common goal to protect, enhance and restore the New Jersey Highlands and its natural, scenic and historic resources.

Julia Somers, executive director of the Highlands Coalition and Elliott Ruga, senior policy analyst, commended Jon Holt, Friends of Fairmount issues manager, and Angela Holt for the Friends' nearly six-year battle against the utility and state regulators.

"The Friends of Fairmount Historic District took on Jersey Central Power & Light, or I should say JCP&L took on Angela and Jon Holt when the company proposed to build a substation in an historic district in Tewksbury Township, said Ruga. "The Friends of Fairmount produced a video, sent out press releases, testified at hearings and kept the media's attention, they rallied their neighbors, got the municipality and the Highlands Council on their side, hired one of the most effective land use attorneys

in the state to advocate on their behalf, and they took on JCP&L and NJDEP in court, on appeal, and on appeal again".

Those that joined the fight with the Friends were Tewksbury Township and many of its residents as well as the NJ Highlands Council, all of which challenged the appropriateness of JCP&L's site and its inability to properly buffer the substation in an historic district. The Columbia University Environmental Law Clinic also joined the Friends in its appeals before the state Appellate Court.

In May the [appellate court ruled in favor of JCP&L and in September the court's opinion was published](#), meaning the case can be cited as preceden-setting in other cases.

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