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HOUSE BILL NO. 1298

Offered January 8, 2020

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A BILL to amend and reenact §§ 56-46.1 and 56-580 of the Code of Virginia, relating to the permitting of electrical generating facilities by the State Corporation Commission.

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Referred to Committee on Agriculture, Chesapeake and Natural Resources

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:**1. That §§ 56-46.1 and 56-580 of the Code of Virginia are amended and reenacted as follows:****§ 56-46.1. Commission to consider environmental, economic and improvements in service reliability factors in approving construction of electrical utility facilities; approval required for construction of certain electrical transmission lines; notice and hearings.**

A. Whenever the Commission is required to approve the construction of any electrical utility facility, it shall give consideration to the effect of that facility on the environment and establish such conditions as may be desirable or necessary to minimize adverse environmental impact. In order to avoid duplication of governmental activities, any valid permit or approval required for an electric generating plant and associated facilities issued or granted by a federal, state, or local governmental entity charged by law with responsibility for issuing permits or approvals regulating environmental impact and mitigation of adverse environmental impact or for other specific public interest issues such as building codes, transportation plans, and public safety, whether such permit or approval is granted prior to or after the Commission's decision, shall be deemed to satisfy the requirements of this section with respect to all matters that (i) are governed by the permit or approval or (ii) are within the authority of, and were considered by, the governmental entity in issuing such permit or approval; ~~and; however, in considering an application for approval of such a facility, the Commission shall impose no additional conditions with respect to such matters may consider environmental effects not expressly governed by a permit or expressly considered by a permitting authority, including carbon emissions and the overall impacts of new and existing facilities on the health and welfare of the residents of the Commonwealth.~~ Nothing in this section shall affect the ability of the Commission to keep the record of a case open. Nothing in this section shall affect any right to appeal such permits or approvals in accordance with applicable law. In the case of a proposed facility located in a region that was designated as of July 1, 2001, as serious nonattainment for the one-hour ozone standard as set forth in the federal Clean Air Act, the Commission shall not issue a decision approving such proposed facility that is conditioned upon issuance of any environmental permit or approval. In every proceeding under this subsection, the Commission shall receive and give consideration to all reports that relate to the proposed facility by state agencies concerned with environmental protection; and if requested by any county or municipality in which the facility is proposed to be built, to local comprehensive plans that have been adopted pursuant to Article 3 (§ 15.2-2223 et seq.) of Chapter 22 of Title 15.2. Additionally, the Commission (a) shall consider the effect of the proposed facility on economic development within the Commonwealth, including but not limited to furtherance of the economic and job creation objectives of the Commonwealth Energy Policy set forth in §§ 67-101 and 67-102, and (b) shall consider any improvements in service reliability that may result from the construction of such facility.

B. Subject to the provisions of subsection J, no electrical transmission line of 138 kilovolts or more shall be constructed unless the State Corporation Commission shall, after at least 30 days' advance notice by (i) publication in a newspaper or newspapers of general circulation in the counties and municipalities through which the line is proposed to be built, (ii) written notice to the governing body of each such county and municipality, and (iii) causing to be sent a copy of the notice by first class mail to all owners of property within the route of the proposed line, as indicated on the map or sketch of the route filed with the Commission, which requirement shall be satisfied by mailing the notice to such persons at such addresses as are indicated in the land books maintained by the commissioner of revenue, director of finance or treasurer of the county or municipality, approve such line. Such notices shall include a written description of the proposed route the line is to follow, as well as a map or sketch of the route including a digital geographic information system (GIS) map provided by the public utility showing the location of the proposed route. The Commission shall make GIS maps provided under this subsection available to the public on the Commission's website. Such notices shall be in addition to the advance notice to the chief administrative officer of the county or municipality required pursuant to § 15.2-2202. As a condition to approval the Commission shall determine that the line is needed and that

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59 the corridor or route the line is to follow will reasonably minimize adverse impact on the scenic assets,
60 historic districts and environment of the area concerned. To assist the Commission in this determination,
61 as part of the application for Commission approval of the line, the applicant shall summarize its efforts
62 to reasonably minimize adverse impact on the scenic assets, historic districts, and environment of the
63 area concerned. In making the determinations about need, corridor or route, and method of installation,
64 the Commission shall verify the applicant's load flow modeling, contingency analyses, and reliability
65 needs presented to justify the new line and its proposed method of installation. If the local
66 comprehensive plan of an affected county or municipality designates corridors or routes for electric
67 transmission lines and the line is proposed to be constructed outside such corridors or routes, in any
68 hearing the county or municipality may provide adequate evidence that the existing planned corridors or
69 routes designated in the plan can adequately serve the needs of the company. Additionally, the
70 Commission shall consider, upon the request of the governing body of any county or municipality in
71 which the line is proposed to be constructed, (a) the costs and economic benefits likely to result from
72 requiring the underground placement of the line and (b) any potential impediments to timely
73 construction of the line.

74 C. If, prior to such approval, any interested party shall request a public hearing, the Commission
75 shall, as soon as reasonably practicable after such request, hold such hearing or hearings at such place as
76 may be designated by the Commission. In any hearing the public service company shall provide
77 adequate evidence that existing rights-of-way cannot adequately serve the needs of the company.

78 If, prior to such approval, written requests therefor are received from the governing body of any
79 county or municipality through which the line is proposed to be built or from 20 or more interested
80 parties, the Commission shall hold at least one hearing in the area that would be affected by
81 construction of the line, for the purpose of receiving public comment on the proposal. If any hearing is
82 to be held in the area affected, the Commission shall direct that a copy of the transcripts of any
83 previous hearings held in the case be made available for public inspection at a convenient location in the
84 area for a reasonable time before such local hearing.

85 D. As used in this section, unless the context requires a different meaning:

86 "Environment" or "environmental" shall be deemed to include in meaning "historic," as well as a
87 consideration of the probable effects of the line on the health and safety of the persons in the area
88 concerned.

89 "Interested parties" shall include the governing bodies of any counties or municipalities through
90 which the line is proposed to be built, and persons residing or owning property in each such county or
91 municipality.

92 "Public utility" means a public utility as defined in § 56-265.1.

93 "Qualifying facilities" means a cogeneration or small power production facility which meets the
94 criteria of 18 C.F.R. Part 292.

95 "Reasonably accommodate requests to wheel or transmit power" means:

96 1. That the applicant will make available to new electric generation facilities constructed after
97 January 9, 1991, qualifying facilities and other nonutilities, a minimum of one-fourth of the total
98 megawatts of the additional transmission capacity created by the proposed line, for the purpose of
99 wheeling to public utility purchasers the power generated by such qualifying facilities and other
100 nonutility facilities which are awarded a power purchase contract by a public utility purchaser in
101 compliance with applicable state law or regulations governing bidding or capacity acquisition programs
102 for the purchase of electric capacity from nonutility sources, provided that the obligation of the applicant
103 will extend only to those requests for wheeling service made within the 12 months following
104 certification by the State Corporation Commission of the transmission line and with effective dates for
105 commencement of such service within the 12 months following completion of the transmission line; and

106 2. That the wheeling service offered by the applicant, pursuant to subdivision D 1, will reasonably
107 further the purposes of the Public Utilities Regulatory Policies Act of 1978 (P. L. 95-617), as
108 demonstrated by submitting to the Commission, with its application for approval of the line, the cost
109 methodologies, terms, conditions, and dispatch and interconnection requirements the applicant intends,
110 subject to any applicable requirements of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, to include in its
111 agreements for such wheeling service.

112 E. In the event that, at any time after the giving of the notice required in subsection B, it appears to
113 the Commission that consideration of a route or routes significantly different from the route described in
114 the notice is desirable, the Commission shall cause notice of the new route or routes to be published and
115 mailed in accordance with subsection B. The Commission shall thereafter comply with the provisions of
116 this section with respect to the new route or routes to the full extent necessary to give affected localities
117 and interested parties in the newly affected areas the same protection afforded to affected localities and
118 interested parties affected by the route described in the original notice.

119 F. Approval of a transmission line pursuant to this section shall be deemed to satisfy the
120 requirements of § 15.2-2232 and local zoning ordinances with respect to such transmission line.

121 G. The Commission shall enter into a memorandum of agreement with the Department of
122 Environmental Quality regarding the coordination of their reviews of the environmental impact of
123 electric generating plants and associated facilities.

124 H. An applicant that is required to obtain (i) a certificate of public convenience and necessity from
125 the Commission for any electric generating facility, electric transmission line, natural or manufactured
126 gas transmission line as defined in 49 Code of Federal Regulations § 192.3, or natural or manufactured
127 gas storage facility (hereafter, an energy facility) and (ii) an environmental permit for the energy facility
128 that is subject to issuance by any agency or board within the Secretariat of Natural Resources, may
129 request a pre-application planning and review process. In any such request to the Commission or the
130 Secretariat of Natural Resources, the applicant shall identify the proposed energy facility for which it
131 requests the pre-application planning and review process. The Commission, the Department of
132 Environmental Quality, the Marine Resources Commission, the Department of Game and Inland
133 Fisheries, the Department of Historic Resources, the Department of Conservation and Recreation, and
134 other appropriate agencies of the Commonwealth shall participate in the pre-application planning and
135 review process. Participation in such process shall not limit the authority otherwise provided by law to
136 the Commission or other agencies or boards of the Commonwealth. The Commission and other
137 participating agencies of the Commonwealth may invite federal and local governmental entities charged
138 by law with responsibility for issuing permits or approvals to participate in the pre-application planning
139 and review process. Through the pre-application planning and review process, the applicant, the
140 Commission, and other agencies and boards shall identify the potential impacts and approvals that may
141 be required and shall develop a plan that will provide for an efficient and coordinated review of the
142 proposed energy facility. The plan shall include (a) a list of the permits or other approvals likely to be
143 required based on the information available, (b) a specific plan and preliminary schedule for the
144 different reviews, (c) a plan for coordinating those reviews and the related public comment process, and
145 (d) designation of points of contact, either within each agency or for the Commonwealth as a whole, to
146 facilitate this coordination. The plan shall be made readily available to the public and shall be
147 maintained on a dedicated website to provide current information on the status of each component of the
148 plan and each approval process including opportunities for public comment.

149 I. The provisions of this section shall not apply to the construction and operation of a small
150 renewable energy project, as defined in § 10.1-1197.5, by a utility regulated pursuant to this title for
151 which the Department of Environmental Quality has issued a permit by rule pursuant to Article 5
152 (§ 10.1-1197.5 et seq.) of Chapter 11.1 of Title 10.1.

153 J. Approval under this section shall not be required for any transmission line for which a certificate
154 of public convenience and necessity is not required pursuant to subdivision A of § 56-265.2.

155 **§ 56-580. Transmission and distribution of electric energy.**

156 A. Subject to the provisions of § 56-585.1, the Commission shall continue to regulate pursuant to this
157 title the distribution of retail electric energy to retail customers in the Commonwealth and, to the extent
158 not prohibited by federal law, the transmission of electric energy in the Commonwealth.

159 B. The Commission shall continue to regulate, to the extent not prohibited by federal law, the
160 reliability, quality and maintenance by transmitters and distributors of their transmission and retail
161 distribution systems.

162 C. The Commission shall develop codes of conduct governing the conduct of incumbent electric
163 utilities and affiliates thereof when any such affiliates provide, or control any entity that provides,
164 generation, distribution, or transmission services, to the extent necessary to prevent impairment of
165 competition. Nothing in this chapter shall prevent an incumbent electric utility from offering metering
166 options to its customers.

167 D. The Commission shall permit the construction and operation of electrical generating facilities in
168 Virginia upon a finding that such generating facility and associated facilities (i) will have no material
169 adverse effect upon reliability of electric service provided by any regulated public utility, (ii) are
170 required by the public convenience and necessity, if a petition for such permit is filed after July 1, 2007,
171 and if they are to be constructed and operated by any regulated utility whose rates are regulated
172 pursuant to § 56-585.1, and (iii) are not otherwise contrary to the public interest. In review of a petition
173 for a certificate to construct and operate a generating facility described in this subsection, the
174 Commission shall give consideration to the effect of the facility and associated facilities on the
175 environment and establish such conditions as may be desirable or necessary to minimize adverse
176 environmental impact as provided in § 56-46.1, unless exempt as a small renewable energy project for
177 which the Department of Environmental Quality has issued a permit by rule pursuant to Article 5
178 (§ 10.1-1197.5 et seq.) of Chapter 11.1 of Title 10.1. In order to avoid duplication of governmental
179 activities, any valid permit or approval required for an electric generating plant and associated facilities
180 issued or granted by a federal, state, or local governmental entity charged by law with responsibility for
181 issuing permits or approvals regulating environmental impact and mitigation of adverse environmental

182 impact or for other specific public interest issues such as building codes, transportation plans, and public
183 safety, whether such permit or approval is prior to or after the Commission's decision, shall be deemed
184 to satisfy the requirements of this section with respect to all matters that (i) (a) are governed by the
185 permit or approval or (ii) (b) are within the authority of, and were considered by, the governmental
186 entity in issuing such permit or approval, ~~and; however, in considering an application for approval of~~
187 ~~such a facility, the Commission shall impose no additional conditions with respect to such matters may~~
188 ~~consider environmental effects not expressly governed by a permit or expressly considered by a~~
189 ~~permitting authority, including carbon emissions and the overall impacts of new and existing facilities~~
190 ~~on the health and welfare of the residents of the Commonwealth.~~ Nothing in this section shall affect the
191 ability of the Commission to keep the record of a case open. Nothing in this section shall affect any
192 right to appeal such permits or approvals in accordance with applicable law. In the case of a proposed
193 facility located in a region that was designated as of July 1, 2001, as serious nonattainment for the
194 one-hour ozone standard as set forth in the federal Clean Air Act, the Commission shall not issue a
195 decision approving such proposed facility that is conditioned upon issuance of any environmental permit
196 or approval. The Commission shall complete any proceeding under this section, or under any provision
197 of the Utility Facilities Act (§ 56-265.1 et seq.), involving an application for a certificate, permit, or
198 approval required for the construction or operation by a public utility of a small renewable energy
199 project as defined in § 10.1-1197.5, within nine months following the utility's submission of a complete
200 application therefore. Small renewable energy projects as defined in § 10.1-1197.5 are in the public
201 interest and in determining whether to approve such project, the Commission shall liberally construe the
202 provisions of this title.

203 E. Nothing in this section shall impair the distribution service territorial rights of incumbent electric
204 utilities, and incumbent electric utilities shall continue to provide distribution services within their
205 exclusive service territories as established by the Commission. Subject to the provisions of § 56-585.1,
206 the Commission shall continue to exercise its existing authority over the provision of electric distribution
207 services to retail customers in the Commonwealth including, but not limited to, the authority contained
208 in Chapters 10 (§ 56-232 et seq.) and 10.1 (§ 56-265.1 et seq.) of this title.

209 F. Nothing in this chapter shall impair the exclusive territorial rights of an electric utility owned or
210 operated by a municipality as of July 1, 1999, or by an authority created by a governmental unit exempt
211 from the referendum requirement of § 15.2-5403. Nor shall any provision of this chapter apply to any
212 such electric utility unless (i) that municipality or that authority created by a governmental unit exempt
213 from the referendum requirement of § 15.2-5403 elects to have this chapter apply to that utility or (ii)
214 that utility, directly or indirectly, sells, offers to sell or seeks to sell electric energy to any retail
215 customer eligible to purchase electric energy from any supplier in accordance with § 56-577 if that retail
216 customer is outside the geographic area that was served by such municipality as of July 1, 1999, except
217 (a) any area within the municipality that was served by an incumbent public utility as of that date but
218 was thereafter served by an electric utility owned or operated by a municipality or by an authority
219 created by a governmental unit exempt from the referendum requirement of § 15.2-5403 pursuant to the
220 terms of a franchise agreement between the municipality and the incumbent public utility, or (b) where
221 the geographic area served by an electric utility owned or operated by a municipality is changed
222 pursuant to mutual agreement between the municipality and the affected incumbent public utility in
223 accordance with § 56-265.4:1. If an electric utility owned or operated by a municipality as of July 1,
224 1999, or by an authority created by a governmental unit exempt from the referendum requirement of
225 § 15.2-5403 is made subject to the provisions of this chapter pursuant to clause (i) or (ii) of this
226 subsection, then in such event the provisions of this chapter applicable to incumbent electric utilities
227 shall also apply to any such utility, mutatis mutandis.

228 G. The applicability of all provisions of this chapter except § 56-594 to any investor-owned
229 incumbent electric utility supplying electric service to retail customers on January 1, 2003, whose
230 service territory assigned to it by the Commission is located entirely within Dickenson, Lee, Russell,
231 Scott, and Wise Counties shall be suspended effective July 1, 2003, so long as such utility does not
232 provide retail electric services in any other service territory in any jurisdiction to customers who have
233 the right to receive retail electric energy from another supplier. During any such suspension period, the
234 utility's rates shall be (i) its capped rates established pursuant to § 56-582 for the duration of the capped
235 rate period established thereunder, and (ii) determined thereafter by the Commission on the basis of such
236 utility's prudently incurred costs pursuant to Chapter 10 (§ 56-232 et seq.) of this title.

237 H. The expiration date of any certificates granted by the Commission pursuant to subsection D, for
238 which applications were filed with the Commission prior to July 1, 2002, shall be extended for an
239 additional two years from the expiration date that otherwise would apply.