

From The Evening Sun
NYRI hire seeks information on local towns

By: Michael McGuire, Sun Staff Writer

Published on: Tuesday, May 15, 2007
CHENANGO COUNTY – A consulting firm working for New York Regional Interconnect Inc. made calls in the last two weeks to at least two local townships requesting information on zoning and building laws.

The reason for the requests is unknown at this time.

According to Town of Guilford clerk Barbara Strier, a representative from the ESS Group, a Rhode Island-based environmental consulting and engineering firm enlisted by the \$1.6 million power line developer, called her office sometime during the week of April 30 asking for a host of documents.

“He wanted a copy of local laws related to everything,” said Strier, who granted the public information request. “He wanted them all.”

Strier said the caller initially did not indicate his identity, but eventually confirmed he was from ESS.

“He didn’t lead on to who he was or where he was,” said Strier.

Strier said the representative, believed to be Jim Arnoux, an environmental scientist for ESS, did not state why he needed the information. Arnoux, who did not return comment Monday, also left a voice message Friday with the Town of North Norwich, said clerk Loretta L. Smith.

NYRI spokesman David Kalson could not explain the purpose of the requests.

“Frankly, I don’t know,” he said.

Kalson said he would look into the matter, but did not call back.

ESS specializes in a number of areas in industrial, commercial and residential development, including the planning, siting, and permitting of transmission and other energy related projects. The firm lists NYRI as a “project highlight” on its website.

Dan Behuniak, acting head of the Chenango County Planning Department, said only Guilford and North Norwich – two of the six towns along NYRI’s route through the county – had been contacted as far as he knew. The others – Afton, Bainbridge, Norwich, and Sherburne – confirmed they had not been sought out by ESS.

Smith said Arnoux left a message Friday and is reportedly “interested in zoning and such

for the town (North Norwich).” As of Monday morning, Smith said she had not returned his message.

Neither Guilford or North Norwich have zoning laws. Also, Guilford’s one-year moratorium on the permitting or construction of direct current power lines expired May 10. Since local law can’t prohibit the power line, which will ultimately be decided at the state or federal level, the town has since passed a resolution stating its official opposition to the power line.

Since March 2006, NYRI has been officially seeking to build a 1,200 megawatt, direct current transmission line from Oneida to Orange County, cutting across 44 miles, six townships and two villages in Chenango. NYRI, an Albany-based subsidiary of a Canadian energy firm, claims the line will relieve energy congestion, bolster electricity reliability and lower utility costs in metropolitan New York, where it is said upgrades in the electricity grid are needed in the next five to ten years. However, NYRI’s project was turned back by the New York state Public Service Commission – the agency that oversees state power line permitting – in July. It was cited that NYRI failed to provide the proper information in its Article VII review application, including proof that its power line would increase electricity reliability.

Citizens and politicians up and down the proposed 190-mile-long route have come out in opposition of the line. They’ve expressed concern in regards to NYRI’s motives as a private company and the negative impacts it’s believed the project would incur environmentally and economically.

NYRI is expected to resubmit a completed Article VII application sometime in June. Also, the power line developer will be challenging a state law in federal court that currently blocks its use of eminent domain to take private property without negotiations. Those proceedings are slated to begin in early June.