

# Hudson Valley Smart Energy Coalition

Town of Clinton  
Clinton Concerned Citizens  
Columbia Land Conservancy  
Dutchess County Government  
Dutchess Land Conservancy  
Town of Claverack

Farmers and Families for Claverack  
Town of Livingston  
Farmers and Families for Livingston  
Town of Milan  
The Olana Partnership  
Omega Institute

Pleasant Valley Concerned Citizens  
Preservation League of New York State  
Scenic Hudson  
Town of Pleasant Valley  
Walnut Grove Farm  
Winnakee Land Trust

The HVSEC is a broad-based collaboration of community groups and officials partnered with Scenic Hudson to advocate for strategies that will strengthen the state electric grid without damaging Hudson Valley ratepayers and key assets. See our Supporting Organizations at [www.hvsec.org/supporting-organizations](http://www.hvsec.org/supporting-organizations).

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Regional Coalition Submits Expert Reports Showing Proposed Power Lines Would Have Environmental and Visual Impacts Including Impairment to Roosevelt National Historic Site**

#### **HVSEC looks forward to upcoming two-part technical conference**

**HUDSON VALLEY**—The Hudson Valley Smart Energy Coalition (HVSEC) on July 6 submitted to the New York State Public Service Commission (PSC) a series of reports by expert consultants. These reports indicate potential major environmental and visual impacts from a current proposal for high-voltage power lines in the Hudson Valley. Research shows some of the proposed projects would threaten the farms and orchards in the heart of the valley's agricultural region as well as the most-visited natural, cultural and historic sites, including the Roosevelt National Historic Site, where Franklin Roosevelt lived from boyhood through his presidency. The lines proposed under the state's Energy Highway initiative could reach a height of 120 feet and cut through 25 communities in seven Hudson Valley counties, impacting businesses and regional assets that are the foundation of the region's economy.

The expert reports will serve as the basis of HVSEC presentations in a PSC Technical Conference on Monday, July 20, to discuss environmental, visual and other impacts of the proposed transmission line projects. The HVSEC also has recently been informed by the PSC that its Department of Public Service staff will require more time to analyze need for the proposed high-voltage power lines, so the part of the Technical Conference that addresses need will be postponed until a future date.

#### **Visual impacts could be damaging to FDR sites, Olana and other job-creating attractions**

HVSEC engaged Dr. Richard Smardon, professor emeritus at the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry in Syracuse, to evaluate potential visual impacts from the transmission line projects. Dr. Smardon found that there was potential for significantly increased visual impacts in the Hudson Valley from some of the project proposals. Agricultural areas in Columbia County are particularly vulnerable to any increase in height or number of transmission towers, due to the significant distance over which lines can be seen on the agricultural landscape. Farms are a major part of the local economy in Columbia County. Agriculture and tourism in Columbia County are responsible for more than 1,400 jobs, and \$115 million in spending annually.

In addition, a number of designated Scenic Areas of Statewide Significance would be traversed by the proposed power lines, which could be visible from the Olana State Historic Site and the Omega Institute for Holistic Studies, both of which are facilities attracting tens of thousands of visitors per year—and contributing strongly to the local economy—in part due to the scenic beauty of their natural surroundings.

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## Page 2, Expert Reports Show Environmental, Visual Impacts from Proposed Power Lines

One proposed project would create a new utility corridor directly adjacent to the FDR Home and Library and through the Roosevelt Farm Lane property and Val-Kill. These National Historic Sites are key destinations of the regional tourism economy in Dutchess County that brings in \$475 million in spending yearly and is linked to more than 8,400 jobs. New transmission lines towering nearly 100 feet over the bucolic Roosevelt historic sites would detract from the beauty and integrity of these places. The Farm Lane—historically part of the Roosevelt estate and frequented by FDR during his lifetime—was sold by descendants of the president after his death. When Scenic Hudson preserved the land in 2007 and transferred it to the National Park Service, then-U.S. Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne termed it “the most important expansion of the Roosevelt National Historic Site that will ever happen.” The construction of new transmission lines through this key link between two National Historic Sites would be a major blow to the integrity of the properties and regional heritage-tourism economy.

### **Environmental impacts should be of concern to communities and local economies**

HVSEC engaged CC Environment & Planning of Batavia, N.Y., to evaluate potential environmental impacts from the transmission line projects under consideration by the PSC. The firm found that all of the proposed projects would likely result in some permanent environmental impacts to wetlands, water resources, and/or sensitive habitat areas within the Hudson Valley. Projects that propose to use a new transmission right-of-way had high potential for significant impacts, and generally projects that consist entirely of reconductoring would have comparatively less impact. Numerous state-designated Significant Coastal Habitats, Significant Natural Communities and New York State Department of Environmental Conservation classified wetlands could be compromised by one or more of the proposals. Two of the proposals involve entirely new transmission rights-of-way that would impact the state-recognized Illinois Mountain Biologically Important Area in Ulster County.

In addition to Hudson Valley and other downstate utility customers paying 90 percent of the projects’ costs—which could exceed \$1 billion—as well as 80 percent of any cost overruns, Hudson Valley residents also could lose one of the regional economy’s most important resources—the unique scenic and environmental qualities that attract visitors, companies and skilled workers.

Important environmental, scenic and agricultural lands are the cornerstone of a sustainable Hudson Valley economy. By maintaining scenic working landscapes, rural heritage and quality of life, preserving farmland also helps drive economic growth. A study by The Trust for Public Land notes that executives looking to relocate or start firms rank quality of life—including an abundance of parks and open space—higher than housing, cost of living and good schools. Further, conserved farms safeguard wildlife habitat and environmentally sensitive areas, including local aquifers and drinking-water supplies.

**Scenic Hudson President Ned Sullivan** said, “While Governor Cuomo has stated his policy preference for projects that stay within existing utility corridors, the Energy Highway continues to attract projects that cast a shadow over the very assets of the Hudson Valley that are generating jobs and contributing to the region’s quality of life. Proposals that could cost ratepayers over \$1 billion without demonstrated need and damage heritage sites such as the place where President Roosevelt guided the nation through the Great Depression and World War II should be relegated to the wastebin of history.”

“Large industrial-scale towers are incompatible with the Hudson Valley’s growing agritourism, which is a bright but fragile emerging upstate economy,” said **Will Yandik, deputy supervisor of the Town of Livingston and fourth-generation farmer**. “Increasingly, viewsheds and scenery are commodities that farmers capitalize on as much as the fresh fruit and produce they raise on their lands.”

**Omega Institute for Holistic Studies Chief Executive Officer Robert “Skip” Backus** said, “Every so often a decision comes in front of a community that can have impact for generations. For the Hudson Valley the proposed power line development is one of those decisions. The scenic beauty of the region is the foundation of our economic and social well-being and one of the main reasons we chose to call the valley home. My hope, given that we now know there is no need for this project, and the significant negative impact it will have on the region’s environment, is that we will act as stewards of the future and not proceed with the proposed development.”

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### **Page 3, Expert Reports Show Environmental, Visual Impacts from Proposed Power Lines**

“The Hudson Valley is one of the finest jewels in New York’s crown and the unique and speciality agriculture that the Hudson Valley has become known for needs to be nurtured and grown rather than be negatively impacted by the shortsighted, archaic and unneeded plan of more and bigger transmission wires to deliver electricity from upstate to downstate,” said **Greg Quinn of Walnut Grove Farm**. “Don’t downgrade the blooming agriculture industry and burgeoning agritourism in the Hudson Valley with this ill-conceived Energy Highway ‘upgrade.’ ”

“We depend on two major drivers for our economy in Columbia County—tourism and agriculture,” said **Farmers and Families for Claverack leader Ian Solomon**. “If a project comes along that threatens both of those drivers, we need to step back and take a look at why it’s being proposed, how much it might cost and what the benefit would be to area residents and businesses. So far we’ve been completely unsatisfied with the answers we’ve discovered.”

#### **Coalition remains eager to demonstrate lack of need for proposed power lines**

HVSEC also has engaged experts to evaluate whether the proposed transmission lines are needed at all. The PSC has postponed the part of the technical conference that would focus on this issue, so its staff can evaluate new power generation capacity expected to come on line, further reducing the rationale for the transmission solutions. The HVSEC is prepared to present its case on this issue when the PSC is ready to proceed.

#### **About the Hudson Valley Smart Energy Coalition**

The Hudson Valley Smart Energy Coalition includes municipal officials; environmental, cultural, historic and land preservation organizations; businesses; and residents who support creation of a modern, comprehensive energy plan for the Hudson Valley and New York State. More information available at [www.hvsec.org](http://www.hvsec.org).