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## Chops Point neighbors prefer tower lights be extinguished

CMP/AVANGRID explains plans for aircraft radar-activated lighting system

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CMP/Avangrid unit manager for transmission lines Jenna Muzzy, far left, listens to a question.  
PHIL DI VECE/Wiscasset Newspaper



CMP's transmission towers at Chops Point as seen from the Bath side of the Kennebec River.  
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Residents on both sides of the Kennebec River want Central Maine Power to eliminate or greatly reduce the intensity of strobe lighting on its transmission towers on Chops Point. The flashing

red and white lighting warns approaching aircraft of the towers and transmission lines crossing Merrymeeting Bay between Woolwich and Bath.

Wednesday night, Jan. 29 in Woolwich, officials from CMP's parent company AVANGRID offered what they hope will be a solution. But for the foreseeable future, residents will have to live with the lighting as it is.

AVANGRID Vice President of Projects Jim Cole opened the meeting with an apology to the communities affected by the tower lighting. Cole said there had been a lack of communication between the power company and the neighborhoods. "Tonight's meeting is to hear your questions and concerns," he added, then turned the floor over to Jenna Muzzy, unit manager for transmission lines. Muzzy provided a 20-minute power-point presentation explaining CMP's plans for equipping the 240-foot towers with radar-activated lighting.

The state-of-the-art system would be installed on top of a tower on the Woolwich side of Chops Point. She explained it will detect when an aircraft is in the area and, once detected, turn the hazard lighting on, and then off again when the aircraft has safely passed.

Muzzy said the system won't eliminate the lights all together. "It will greatly reduce the time when they're on." Currently, the white strobe lights on the towers blink during the daytime, and the red strobes come on at night. This is the first time CMP is equipping one of its transmission towers with radar-activated lighting, added Muzzy.

Before the radar system can be installed, CMP needs approval from both the Federal Aviation Administration and Federal Communication Commission.

Muzzy said CMP hopes to have the radar system installed by August and fully operational by October. She said the installation couldn't begin in the spring due to a nesting bald eagle in the area.

Friends of Merrymeeting Bay (FOMB), a Richmond-based nonprofit dedicated to preserving and protecting Merrymeeting Bay's ecosystem, filed documentation with the company opposing the aircraft radar-activated lighting.

"(T)his could worsen things further, blanketing the area with radar microwaves, often harmful to people and with evidence of adverse behavioral changes to birds, bats and other wildlife," the document states. "For a densely populated area, this is a particularly bad idea. Friends of Merrymeeting Bay is adamantly opposed to such a system."

During the meeting's question and answer session, FOMB Chair Ed Friedman called the radar system costly and unnecessary. He planned to post FOMB's findings and analysis on FOMB's website. Residents of Woolwich, Bath and Topsham asked why CMP couldn't just turn the lights off. Cole responded without the lighting, the towers and transmission lines posed a danger to aircraft. He added, at their height, the FAA requires a specific lighting pattern there.

Responding to questions, Muzzy said CMP had not looked into putting its transmission lines under the river; and the company could look at integrating its radar-activated lighting with other towers. She said this would take time, since the technology was new and untried.

District 23 Sen. Eloise Vitelli (D-Sagadahoc) said she appreciated CMP and AVANGRID's effort to reach out to the communities, but that she understood people's frustration, too. "They'll have to continue living with these lights at least for a time," she commented. Vitelli and five legislative representatives representing Bath, Woolwich, Bowdoinham and Topsham recently filed a letter to CMP officials in hopes of resolving complaints over the tower lighting.

Woolwich resident Curtis Fish said his home was directly impacted by the tower lighting which, he said, had greatly changed the night sky. Fish felt Woolwich officials should have required a site review before CMP started the project replacing the towers.

CMP officials said no local permits were required from Woolwich. Permits were required from the Army Corps of Engineers, Maine Department of Environmental Protection, and FAA. Bath required building and small scale utility permits and approval of an erosion and sedimentation plan.

Woolwich Selectman Allison Hepler, who is also the House District 53 representative, said she was grateful for the time and attention CMP brought to this issue. But she said she left the meeting less convinced the lights are even necessary. "I worry that we missed that chance. Had they taken the time, and been more involved in the communities early on, they may have been able to craft a less cookie cutter approach," she commented afterwards in an email to Wiscasset Newspaper.

The towers were erected last year and replaced shorter ones built in 1940. The previous ones weren't equipped with aircraft warning lights. The towers carry electrical transmission lines across the Kennebec River at the lower part of Merrymeeting Bay linking Chops Point, Woolwich to Chops Point, Bath.

CMP/AVANGRID officials encouraged people with questions to fill out comment cards and forward them to the company. They can also telephone the project's information contact line at 888-267-0831.