

Clemson Should Not Build an Electric Substation Near an Elementary School

As employees of Clemson University, we write to express frustration with the university's decision to partner with Duke Energy to build an electric substation on the former baseball field beside the old Armory building on Pendleton Rd, near the intersection with U.S. 76, and very near the Clemson Montessori School. Electric substations are installations where high voltages from transmission lines are stepped down to lower voltages for distribution lines that move electricity through neighborhoods. Electromagnetic fields around transmission lines are greater than those around distribution lines. By locating the electric substation near a school, the university and Duke Energy are placing transmission lines in close proximity to children. Though the science around the health risks of electromagnetic fields (EMF) has not yet established a definitive link to childhood leukemia, in a published report titled "Biological Effects of Power Frequency Electric and Magnetic Fields" the U.S. Office of Technology Assessment recommended a policy of "prudent avoidance." In similar studies, Great Britain's National Radiological Protection Board and the Australian government affirmed the recommendation. Duke Energy admits in its own informational flyers that they "are not able to determine the potential effect of EMF on human health." Just as early studies of the risks around smoking were inconclusive, so too are the studies of risks associated with repeated exposure to electric and magnetic fields, but we think we can all agree that building an electric substation beside a school makes "prudent avoidance" difficult.

University leadership, including President Clements and Provost Jones, has repeatedly referred concerned parties to Duke Energy representatives, as if Duke Energy has been tasked with the leadership of this community. Duke Energy has resisted an open, public meeting with concerned citizens. In communications with smaller groups, Duke Energy has explained that other locations – locations owned by Clemson University – had been studied and considered technically viable, all of them farther from the elementary and primary school that the current location threatens. The City of Clemson explains that Clemson University refuses to allocate other space for the substation, and City Council has claimed to have no jurisdiction or capacity for involvement in this decision. Our leadership is failing us. We ask them all to do better and to recognize that meaningful leadership has to include the willingness to revisit decisions that specifically threaten the welfare of the community. A university that so often characterizes itself as a family should care more about its families. Employee morale is low. As Clemson makes the town a harder place to live, it makes itself a harder place to love.

Brian McGrath
College of Architecture, Arts and Humanities

Brian Powell
College of Engineering, Computing and Applied Sciences
SCIENCE

Erin M. Goss
College of Architecture, Arts and Humanities

Jasmine Townsend
College of Behavioral, Social and Health Sciences

Raquel Anido
College of Architecture, Arts and Humanities

Mariah Magagnotti
College of Engineering, Computing, and Applied Sciences

David Coombs
College of Architecture, Arts and Humanities

Angela Naimou
College of Architecture, Arts and Humanities