

# Battle in Dunwoody: People vs. Ga. Power

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When Neal and Lisa Chatigny bought their north DeKalb home a little more than a year ago, they liked the backyard looking onto a woods beyond their fence.

The location was perfect for Neal Chatigny, a pharmaceutical sales rep who calls on doctors at hospitals in the Perimeter area. The lucky to find a renovated ranch house they could afford in a neighborhood where property prices have been climbing.



Louie Favorite/AJC

But last fall, Georgia Power purchased the woody one-acre lot behind their house to build an electrical substation. Now the couple hopes that the utility will buy their home, because they don't want to build any more.

They've attended neighborhood meetings with power company officials, and they don't like what they've learned.

"It would literally tower over our backyard and we would hear it constantly," said Lisa Chatigny, who works for an auditing firm.

Neal and Lisa Chatigny want Georgia Power to buy their property if a substation is built next-door.

"At the first two meetings I cried hysterically when they showed us the rendering. The only reason I didn't cry at the last meeting was that I didn't look at it."

Her neighbors aren't happy either.

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Bright yellow signs sprang up in yards and on utility poles reading "No power substation in your neighborhood." For Sale signs went up, too. Residents started a Web site, [www.nosubstation.org](#), and they've tried to enlist their elected officials' help.

As they researched the issue and got organized, residents said they were shocked to learn that no government body – local or state – has any say over where electrical substations are built.

It's not unusual for residents to fight utility companies over the placement of substations and transmission lines. But the proposed substation on Ashford Dunwoody Road near Dunwoody Lane would mark the first time that Georgia Power has built a "compact" substation on one acre rather than the 2-3 acres that a power company typically uses.

Residents along Dunwoody Lane say company officials have told them at community meetings that compact substations are "the wave of the future" as vacant land gets harder to find and the need for electrical substations grows. Lolita Jackson, a spokeswoman for Georgia Power, said the substation is needed to keep up with the demands of new construction and redevelopment in the Ashford Dunwoody area. In general, she said, people don't realize how much the use of electricity has increased, even in more established parts of Atlanta.

"We've grown from one television in the house to two, three or four," Jackson said. "We're using computers. We're using a lot of things in our homes that are helping with [increasing] the load on our distribution system as well."

The company's plans call for the substation to be in service by June 2008, which means construction would start in 2007, she said.

Jackson said the utility has been having a tougher time finding land to build needed substations, but she and fellow spokeswoman Kelli Monroe said it's too early to predict whether compact substations on smaller lots will become more common.

"As we look at more populous areas we're going to have to think outside of the box," Monroe said. "You may see more compact substations in the future, but we're not able to acquire the land that we'd like to have which is the two, three acres."

Tax records show the utility paid \$740,000 for the 1-acre lot in Dunwoody, which is zoned single-family residential. The residents along Dunwoody Lane and neighboring streets say they still hope to persuade Georgia Power to move the project to a nearby light industrial area.

Rep. Mike Jacobs (D-Atlanta) has joined residents in urging the company to find another site. Jacobs said he thinks utilities should be required to abide by local zoning codes when choosing sites for substations, which would create some rules for where they can be built and give residents an opportunity for public input early in the process.

Sen. Dan Weber (R-Dunwoody) hasn't taken a position on the dispute, but he agreed that state lawmakers should look at whether there should be an independent body that reviews such decisions.

Weber said Georgia Power has chosen a site that seems to be best for the company, but not the best for area residents and businesses.

"I guess that's probably the case in many instances from Georgia Power's perspective," Weber said. "But I think there needs to be a balance of those considerations more so than we currently have."

Company officials say they are reviewing the residents' suggestions.