

Opponents pipe up about pipelines

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BY TERESA EDMOND

SUBURBAN TRENDS

STAFF WRITER

Opponents of a proposed natural gas pipeline said it would destroy the local scenery and ruin water resources for 2.5 million state residents.

At a Nov. 1 public hearing on the proposal at the E.G. Hewitt School, details of the Northeast Upgrade Project were discussed. This project would involve the construction of about 37 miles of 30-inch natural gas pipeline in five loop segments in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. This project would cut through the North Jersey region, including Ringwood and West Milford. A pipeline loop is a line constructed parallel to an existing pipeline, with the intent to increase capacity.

As of now, planned construction of the Northeast Upgrade Project would disturb about 638 acres of land for the aboveground facilities and the pipeline. Following construction, about 112 acres would be maintained for permanent operation of the project facilities.

Tennessee Gas Pipeline Company (TGP) is already building a controversial gas line through more than 16 miles of the forested and protected Highlands Region. The new pipeline loops would primarily be installed adjacent to TGP's existing pipeline system, known as the 300 line.

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) staff will prepare an environmental assessment, which lays out the environmental impacts of the Northeast Upgrade Project. FERC is the lead federal agency that conducts environmental review of interstate pipeline projects in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act.

Kate Millsaps of the NJ Highlands Coalition said splitting what she perceived as one project into two pipeline projects would be "inappropriate."

"This agency (FERC) should examine all resulting impacts from both projects in a ... document, as both are connected and dependent on the other," she said.

The Northeast Upgrade Project would increase natural gas capacity by about 636,000 dekatherms per day from a TGP compressor station in Mercer County, Penn. to its delivery point at Mahwah. Combined with the 300 line project, total capacity is expected to increase around 1 million dekatherms.

Opponents also criticized the method in which the natural gas may be obtained through a controversial gas drilling called hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking." According to a statement from the NJ Sierra Club, fracking could destroy thousands of acres of forests and contaminate surface and groundwater from the chemicals used in fracking.

"This pipeline will not only be a scar through the Highlands, but will have tremendous impacts on our water supply both in New Jersey and along the entire Delaware River Basin," said NJ Sierra Club Director Jeff Tittel in the statement.

In an interview, TGP project manager Jerry Creel said TGP "has no intention of messing up their water." However, sacrifices would be involved in constructing a pipeline. Such sacrifices include tree cutting and soil digging.

"Those are environmental costs that are incurred as a result of infrastructure projects of this type," he said. "You have to weigh that – is it worth the environmental impacts that you're going to incur in order to provide additional capacity for a good source of clean-burning natural gas?"

The Northeast Upgrade Project is in its pre-filing stage. This means that no formal application has been filed with FERC at this time.

If all goes well for TGP, the pipeline intends to launch construction of the Northeast Upgrade Project in late 2012.

E-mail: edmond@northjersey.com