

Parsippany residents, townships, environmentalists oppose Pilgrim Pipeline

June 11, 2014 Last updated: Wednesday, June 11, 2014, 12:31 AM

By Lisa Kintish

STAFF WRITER

Parsippany Life

Pilgrim Pipeline Holdings LLC is in the preliminary stages of a proposed pipeline to carry crude oil from Albany, NY, to Linden, where it will be refined and then carried back to Albany. There is a possibility it could run through Parsippany and Montville Township, a prospect that does not sit well with residents and officials alike.

According to George Bochis, vice president of development for Pilgrim Pipeline Holdings LLC, a route has not yet been determined. The company is looking into land routes within existing transportation and utility corridors so as to "reduce the project's impact on residents."

Bochis further noted, "Plans call for more than 95 percent of the route to be located within existing rights of way in a concerted effort to make the pipeline's impact on residents and the environment as minimal as possible."

Those existing rights of way (ROW) may include the ones that belong to PSE&G. Michael diPierro, a Parsippany councilman, said in a phone interview that those ROWs date back years and when the utility company replaced its towers with larger ones, it did so on the same footprints, using helicopters to avoid trampling through the environmentally sensitive Troy Meadows, of which 1,500 acres are in Parsippany. diPierro noted that in laying down the pipes, Pilgrim Pipeline will not be using helicopters and that is a "major problem."

diPierro said that if Pilgrim Pipeline follows the ROW, it will upset wetlands and wildlife.

"I don't want to see this happen," he declared.

The councilman is not alone. He was one of about 40 people who attended a meeting hosted by a coalition of environmental and community groups. The reason for the meeting, on May 27 at the Parsippany Main Library, was to provide information about the pipeline to concerned residents and let them know how they can become more involved in fighting it.

According to a letter sent out by the New Jersey Sierra Club in advance of the meeting, the 178-mile bidirectional pipeline will carry Bakken crude oil which is produced by fracking in North Dakota.

The Sierra Club letter explained, "Bakken crude oil is highly explosive and toxic. Moving this fuel by barge, rail, or pipeline would result in significant public health and environmental impacts. All forms of transportation are prone to accidents, spills, and human error. Constructing the pipeline would not replace rail or barge shipments, but would be used to expand the region's capacity to move oil. With the growth in use of shale oil, the pipeline will be in addition to the other forms of transport."

Spokespeople for other environmental groups were quoted in the letter. Matt Smith, organizer of Food & Water Watch, stated, "'Building fracked oil pipelines through New Jersey's residential neighborhoods and protected watershed lands puts our families' health and wellbeing at immediate risk. In this post-Sandy era of rising sea levels and extreme weather, our Jersey Shore communities will be imperiled unless we turn away immediately from dirty fossil fuel infrastructure, including the Pilgrim Pipeline."

Erica Van Auken, campaign and grassroots coordinator, NJ Highlands Coalition, is quoted, "The New Jersey Highlands Coalition is disappointed to hear of yet another proposed pipeline project through the Highlands Region. Unlike projects we've monitored in the past, the Pilgrim Pipeline project proposes a new right of way through land that supplies clean water to more than half the state's population. It is our hope that we can educate potentially-impacted communities before Pilgrim moves ahead with this unwanted pipeline."

Among those lending support to the NJ Sierra Club's fight is Ken Dolsky, spokesperson for the neighborhood coalition, Already Devalued and Devastated Homeowners of Parsippany. His neighborhood is contending with PSE&G's towers and is facing the possibility of JCP&L towers along the same ROW. Pilgrim Pipeline presents the latest issue for these residents.

Dolsky attended the meeting and found the information on both the pipeline and the oil business in general to have been well presented. He said moving ahead, the plan involves educating the public, encouraging a letter-writing campaign to Gov. Chris Christie and other elected officials, and publicly disputing the oil company's assertion of benefits.

For his part, Dolsky has sent resolutions opposing the pipeline to the Morris County Freeholders and Parsippany Township officials.

Kate Millsaps, conservation program coordinator for the NJ Sierra Club, also attended the meeting. She offered, "The landowners along the PSEG right of way Pilgrim is proposing to use are very well organized already due to the various projects that have been proposed or occurred along the ROW in recent years, giving us a much better shot at stopping this new dangerous infrastructure from coming through. Parsippany's municipal officials were leaders in the fight against the Susquehanna Roseland transmission line upgrade and we hope that dedication to protect residents will lead them to action opposing the Pilgrim Pipeline as well."

Pilgrim Pipeline, meanwhile, maintains, "Pipelines are the safest mode of transportation for oil products... A recent study has found that Bakken crude does not significantly differ from other crude oils and poses no greater risks than other flammable liquids authorized for rail transport."

As to any benefits for New Jersey residents, Bochis noted, "Beyond the obvious advantages to NJ and the region of transporting oil and refined products more efficiently and safely via pipeline rather than river barges, in the event of an extended closure of the region's waterways as occurs after severe weather events (the worst being after Hurricane Sandy), the Pilgrim pipeline could supply New Jersey refineries with desperately needed crude oil and ensure that critical fuel supplies are available to emergency responders during natural or man-made disasters, something that would directly benefit NJ businesses and households."

Pilgrim Pipeline acknowledged that it is surveying property in New York and New Jersey, stating that if a resident declines to grant permission for the company to survey the property, they move on to the next residence.

In Montville Township, the website makes note of this surveying, stating: "Since many residents are being contacted by Pilgrim Pipeline Holdings, LLC with a request to survey their property, the Township would like to inform residents of the following information, which is what we know about Pilgrim Pipeline Holding, LLC. Apparently this company is investigating a possible route for a new underground pipeline through the Township. Currently they are contacting property owners along the possible routes for permission to survey their properties. During the September 10, 2013, Township Committee meeting, Pilgrim made a request for permission from the Township to survey Township lands located along their intended route and was denied permission by the Township Committee. Since the Township denied their request, we have not received any further details from Pilgrim. Although the Township has very little information, you are welcome to contact the Township Engineer with regard to any information provided by Pilgrim Pipeline Holdings, LLC that you would like to discuss with him."

The Montville Township Engineer was contacted for this story, but as of press time had not yet responded.

Email: kintish@northjersey.com

© 2014 North Jersey Media Group