



BOB BIFLIK/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

**Bill Reitter (left), Glassboro, and Paul Williams, Toms River protested a proposed New Jersey Natural Gas pipeline at a meeting in Manchester Tuesday.**

## **Debate rages over Pinelands pipeline plan**

**Proposed natural gas line brings standing-room-only crowd to hearing**

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**MANCHESTER** — With some holding signs, such as “gas is explosive,” residents worried about New Jersey Natural Gas’ proposed 30-mile transmission pipeline filled a hearing room here Tuesday.

“I don’t want it in my town,” said Manchester resident Theresa Lettman who feared pipeline explosions. “No protection is given to the residents of Manchester Township if this pipeline is placed along Colonial Drive and Route 70.”

In April, New Jersey Natural Gas filed a proposal with the state Board of Public Utilities for a 30-inch high pressure transmission pipe that will feed the southern portion of the utility’s service territory in Ocean and Burlington counties. Currently, the utility pulls natural gas from a connection in Middlesex County.

Plans call for a new transmission line, called the Southern Reliability Link, to run from Chesterfield Township in Burlington County to North Hanover, Upper Freehold, Plumsted and Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst before it connects with the utility’s system in Manchester.

On Tuesday, the state Board of Public Utilities held a public hearing at Manchester Township’s town hall. The town’s municipal court room was filled to standing room only.

## **Project is necessary**

The project “is necessary to support reliability and system integrity of the company’s natural gas transmission system in that it provides a second major transmission feed to a critical part of the company’s territory,” said John Valeri, a lawyer representing the utility.

The proposed pipeline “will support the safe reliable and resilient delivery of natural gas to New Jersey Natural Gas customers in Ocean, Monmouth” and portions of Burlington counties, Valeri said. “Customers in those counties are the most vulnerable and are likely to be adversely affected by supply interruption or system failure.”

The utility has said the pipeline will be built in accordance with federal and state safety regulations. A spokesman has said it’s needed for reliability and not to meet future customer growth.

But Jeff Tittel, director of the New Jersey chapter of the Sierra Club, called on the BPU to throw out the pipeline proposal.

### **‘Red herring’**

“This reliability issue is a red herring,” Tittel said. “It has nothing to do with helping any home on LBI. In fact this will just be another pipeline that will be bursting in flames in the middle of the day the next time there’s a storm.”

He said the pipeline is for “selling gas to wherever it can go,” such as a power plant or an offshore gas terminal.

“It is cutting through some of the most environmentally ecologically important land, not only in New Jersey, but in the country and in some ways, the world,” Tittel said. “New Jersey has been known as the crossroads of the Revolution. Now it is being known as the crossroads of pipelines.”

Jaclyn Rhoads, assistant executive director of the Pinelands Preservation Alliance, said the construction of the pipeline will result in “ecological destruction” from construction.

“New Jersey Natural Gas has not demonstrated that this pipeline is necessary or even desirable for maintaining or safeguarding the region’s natural gas supply,” Rhoads said. “Ratepayers should not be charged and natural resources should not be threatened by a project that is not necessary for the public welfare.”

Some speakers supported the project.

Long Beach Township Mayor Joseph H. Mancini said his community stands to benefit from a reliable supply of natural gas. He mentioned the “dark and challenging days” after superstorm Sandy when Long Beach Island was without electricity or natural gas service.

“With LBI at the southernmost end of the New Jersey Natural Gas system, the SRL will greatly enhance the natural gas service we cou[nt] on each and every day,” Mancini said. “It will help mitigate potential interruption and ensure safety and reliability for LBI residents and businesses.”