

# Burlington County Times

## Chesterfield passes new resolution opposing natural gas pipeline



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By David Levinsky and Kristina Scala, staff writers

CHESTERFIELD — The township's governing body is finished trying to convince state regulators to reroute a proposed natural gas pipeline away from local homes and businesses.

They now want the project stopped in its entirety.

The five-member Township Committee adopted the tougher position Thursday night in a new resolution laying out the township's case that New Jersey Natural Gas' proposed Southern Reliability Link pipeline is not needed and would not benefit Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst.

*Carl Kosola / Photojournalist | (File) Cindy Pierson, of Cinnaminson, protests in August 2015 at the final public hearing on the proposed Southern Reliability Link natural gas pipeline through northern Burlington, Monmouth and Ocean counties.*

"It is clear now that New Jersey Natural Gas has not shown a need for this pipeline that benefits the public's service, convenience or welfare. To the contrary, it is abundantly clear that the sole purpose of the pipeline is to increase revenues and profits for the utility company," the resolution said.

The proposed 28-mile pipeline would begin in Chesterfield at a compressor station off Route 528 and run east along the highway through North Hanover. It would also cross through the joint base and several towns in Monmouth and Ocean counties.

In its filings, New Jersey Natural Gas claims the high-pressure pipeline is needed to improve reliability and resiliency for its service territory, which mostly is in Ocean and Monmouth counties. But the project has drawn opposition from local residents and elected officials concerned the route is too close to homes, schools and businesses.

Environmental groups also object, arguing that the infrastructure supports hydraulic drilling, called fracking, and promotes dependency on fossil fuels that contribute to climate change.

Township officials said the new resolution was an update to an April resolution the governing body passed that expressed the government's opposition to the utility company's preferred route through the township, but not the

pipeline itself. At the time, officials said they believed the pipeline was intended to assist the joint base, the region's largest employer.

"Since the resolution was adopted more than seven months ago, the township has since learned the pipeline was not only not primarily intended to benefit (Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst), but that any benefits to (the base) are nominal at best, and there is, indeed, substantial doubt as to whether the base would, or could benefit at all from this proposed pipeline," the resolution said.

New Jersey Natural gas spokesman Michael Kinney responded that the project would benefit current and future operations on the joint base, as well as over 1 million people in its service area, which is mostly Ocean and Monmouth counties, and Bass River in Burlington County.

"We continue to work with the towns, counties and state as the process moves forward," he said.

Joint Base Commander Frederick Thaden has endorsed the project, stating in a letter addressed to a state lawmaker that it would provide "natural gas supply redundancy" for the base and would potentially allow the base to convert some of its facilities from oil to gas energy.

In addition to New Jersey Natural Gas' pipeline, Chesterfield is objecting to a related project by Oklahoma-based Williams Transco. The company is seeking federal approval to build a natural gas compressor station on land off Route 528 that would connect the company's existing Trenton-Woodbury line to the Southern Reliability Link.

That project is pending before the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, which has jurisdiction over interstate pipelines that cross through multiple states.

Chesterfield, North Hanover and Burlington County are intervening in New Jersey Natural Gas' case before the BPU, however, county officials have specified that they would not oppose the project if no alternative route is viable.

The position has drawn the ire of many residents who want the county to take a stronger position against the project.

"If you're not representing your local communities then who the heck are you representing?" Bordentown Township Deputy Mayor Jill Popko said Wednesday during the Freeholders meeting. "When (the BPU) has intervention you're the people they want to hear from."

"We need a hero, guys," Chesterfield resident Mike Cronin said. "Superman and Mighty Mouse are gone."

Other residents said they felt the county led them to believe they were in the fight against the pipeline and compressor station.

Freeholder Deputy Director Bruce Garganio told the residents that was never the case.

"We told you from day one we were in favor of the pipeline and we had an issue with the route," he said.

The New Jersey Pinelands Commission also has oversight over the Southern Reliability Link because a portion of the line cross through the million-acre reserve that is home to rare and endangered plants and animals and pristine drinking water.

Because the area of the Pinelands that the pipeline would run through is on the joint base, it is considered "conditionally permitted" under Pinelands development rules, provided that it is associated with the function of the base or sanctioned by the base.

The Pinelands Commission issued a certificate of filing to New Jersey Natural Gas on Wednesday informing the company that commission staff have deemed its application complete and consistent with Pinelands rules.

The certificate does not grant final approval, but it could allow the company to move forward without a vote by the full 15-member Pinelands Commission provided that the BPU approves it.

At the Pinelands Commission's meeting on Friday, several residents and environmental leaders spoke out against the decision, arguing that the full commission should vote on the project after hearing public input.

"Why are you here if the staff does all the work and makes all the decisions," Mount Laurel resident Ann Kelly said.

Sierra Club Director Jeff Tittel and representatives from several other groups argued that most of the joint base's energy comes from Public Service Electric & Gas, not New Jersey Natural Gas.

"I see this as a manipulation. If the facts don't fit, ignore the facts and manipulate the process," Tittel said.

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