

Group says proposed pipeline expansion could impact Somers air quality

BY BOB DUMAS
FOR THE SOMERS RECORD

Members of a grassroots citizens group formed to halt the expansion of the Algonquin gas pipeline in Northern Westchester County say that even though current plans do not call for the expansion to take place in Somers, there are other aspects of the project that could negatively impact the town's environment and health of its citizens.

Three members of SAPE (Stop the Algonquin Pipeline Expansion)—Susan Van Dolsen, Dr. Paul Moskowitz, and Aidrian O'Connor—gave a presentation to the Men's Club at Heritage Hills last month on Houston-based Spectra Energy's proposed plan to replace the current 26-inch diameter with a 42-inch diameter pipe to cross under the Hudson River from Rockland County and into Westchester. The current, 26-inch pipe, according to Spectra, has been in use since 1953.

Van Dolsen said the pipeline expansion would be in close proximity to Indian Point power plant. It would continue through Putnam County, and into New England where it would ultimately terminate in Massachusetts. She said none of the gas carried by the pipeline is targeted for New York State consumers.

Right now, the proposed plan does not call for the pipeline to pass through Somers. However, SAPE officials said that nearby compressor and metering stations are subject to leaks and can emit toxic pollutants into the air. SAPE



PHOTO: BOB DUMAS

Members of SAPE—from left, Dr. Paul Moskowitz, Susan Van Dolsen and Aidrian O'Connor—field questions from the audience after their Algonquin pipeline presentation to the Men's Club at Heritage Hills.

contends that expanding the pipe from its current 26-inch diameter would increase the level of toxins that are released.

"Emissions from compressor stations can be very harmful to your health," Van Dolsen said, noting that the methane that is released is a stronger greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide.

Van Dolsen also said that leakages from the stations can result in explosions.

"[The proposed expansion] tracks through highly populated, very sensitive areas," she said. "One reason we are concerned is they say they are not carrying enough insurance to even cover their own losses."

O'Connor said that there are two metering stations located within a 6-mile span of existing pipeline just north of Somers. One of them

is located by Somers Commons near the Heritage Hills golf course. O'Connor said he visited them earlier this year and took photos.

"It smelled like natural gas but very dirty," O'Connor said of his visits. "It was repulsive and made me want to get out of there. The smell was very overpowering and left a weird coating in my mouth and all I could think is that there are homes 800 feet from here."

SAPE officials said what concerns them is that while the project, as currently designed, does not change the Somers infrastructure; however, there is a second project planned known as the Atlantic Bridge expansion and Somers could wind up back in the pipeline's path.

"Spectra is portraying this as two different projects, but it's really one mega project," O'Connor said.

"Spectra has not laid out its plans. It's a little bit sketchy."

Another concern for SAPE is the construction of "pigging" stations, which are designed to clean out the pipeline with giant brush-like devices known as pigs.

"The pipes have to be cleaned out because the gas causes corrosion, which results in iron oxide, known as black powder," Moskowitz said. "The black powder can become airborne. Pigs are like giant bottle brushes and they push the powder into a trap where it's removed. Originally they wanted to build a pigging station in Yorktown. But then it was revealed that radon is in the pipeline and leaves carcinogenic byproducts mixed in with the black powder, which becomes radioactive. As soon as Yorktown found out about that there was a great outcry about putting it in a Yorktown park. Now there is a question of where the pigging station is going. My opinion is that it should not be in a populated area, but we don't know where it is going. It was originally proposed for Somers and then got moved to Yorktown, but Yorktown Supervisor Michael Grace says it is not going there any more."

Somers Supervisor Rick Morrissey, who attended the meeting along with Councilman Anthony Cirieco, said he was just finding

out about the pigging station.

"We are just learning about them," he said. "They have no business being near residential areas. It's something I am taking under advisement."

Morrissey noted that the Somers Town Board passed a resolution raising the issues of safety and the environmental impact of the proposed pipeline expansion. He said Spectra officials were slated to attend the Oct. 9 Town Board meeting to discuss the project.

Ultimately, SAPE says, it wants the federal government to call for more detailed impact studies on the project before it gives the go ahead. A public hearing was held by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission [FERC] on Sept. 15 in Cortland Manor, and residents can go to SAPE 2016.org and look under "Events" to find out when the next workshop will be held.

"A full risk assessment of all infrastructure and project proposals should be included in the Environmental Impact Study factoring in pipeline explosions and methane leaks from infrastructure," SAPE said in a printed handout. "FERC should consider the climate change impacts of this proposal by adopting a carbon neutral standard for pipeline approval, including the lifecycle impacts of methane extraction on climate change."

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