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Firm allays concerns about pipeline route

By: Scott Morgan , Staff Writer

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Engineering firm holds second public information session to discuss proposed natural gas pipeline with Bordentown Township residents.

BORDENTOWN TOWNSHIP — While some residents continue to oppose the construction of a 3.5-mile natural gas pipeline through their town, others were grateful that it won't literally be going through their back yards.

Representatives of Williams, an engineering firm based in Tulsa, Okla., and Transco, which operates 10,500 miles of natural gas pipelines between Texas and New York, held a second public information session last week regarding their proposal to construct a 36-inch pipeline through parts of the township and Mansfield. The companies held a similar meeting in February at the same location, the Ramada Inn on Route 206.

Last week's meeting, held on June 3, was designed to address concerns ranging from placement of the line to security, which were broached at the first session, according to Gina Johnson, a spokeswoman for Williams.

The pipeline will connect existing Transco lines in Mercer and Burlington counties and serve customers in southern New Jersey.

Residents of Williamsburg Village, a 396-unit condominium complex on Georgetown Road, were the most relieved to learn that the companies' once-favored route, close to the complex's grounds, was no longer the preferred artery.

"I'm extremely pleased to see that the pipeline won't pass Williamsburg Village," said condo President Robert Delaney.

Transco already operates a pipeline that runs along the western side of the New Jersey Turnpike. Transco's new, preferred route is a line along the eastern (northbound) side of the turnpike along a utility route, away from homes and businesses, where most of the line will go.

The line does, however, pass through a section of Old York Stables farm on Old York Road. If Williams/Transco receive final approval from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) as they expect to do in early 2005, this is where the pipeline would go, Ms. Johnson said.

Owner Randy Capes said that while he is not concerned about the safety of the pipeline (in other words, he is not expecting it to blow up), he does have a concern for how his horses will react to heavy construction.

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"Have you ever worked with horses before?" he asked rhetorically. "Our horses are going to be going nuts."

Construction, Mr. Capes said, will be happening about 25 feet from the 70-acre farm's existing stables. Rather than fighting to stop construction, he said, he will move his horses across the farm and eventually move them back. Old York Stables already plays host to two 24-inch gas lines, Mr. Capes said, so this is nothing he hasn't been through before.

"They seem to be trying to work with us," he said of company representatives, adding a smiling caveat, "But everybody's nice until they start working with you."

Ms. Johnson said the terms with Mr. Capes are still being negotiated, but said also that financial compensation is likely if there is a direct impact on the farm's operations.

Regardless of where the pipeline will go, not everyone is happy to know it's coming, of course. Former Committeewoman Pauline Angelo said she was not in favor of the pipeline, "no matter what route."

Georgetown Road resident Terry Zahorchak said there were already several pipelines running below the surface of Bordentown Township, including Transco's. Her neighbor, John Martin, said simply, "My concern is for the township, not for my own house."

Ms. Johnson said, however, that Williams/Transco are working to make the endeavor as easy as possible, hence the second public information session to allow more residential input.

"Siting a pipeline is a difficult process," Ms. Johnson said. "We don't want to design projects and find out at the ninth hour that people are opposed to them."

Transco first made the plans known to township homeowners in December, she said, and has continued to solicit input from residents.

"This has never been a secret," Ms. Johnson said, referring to the session as "a good-faith effort."


"We have to be neighbors to these people," she said.

Williams is expected to file a right-of-way acquisition through FERC in August and expects to start construction in the second half of 2005. Service is slated to begin in November of next year.

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