

Agency seeks local input on pipeline

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Pipeline proposal input solicited

BORDENTOWN TOWNSHIP _ The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission has launched its "pre-filing" environmental review of Williams' Transco's plan to expand a natural gas pipeline through the township and is seeking input from residents, officials and anyone else interested in the project.

FERC representatives met with officials from the township, the county and the state to tour the site of the proposed 3.5-mile pipeline expansion on Tuesday afternoon, and that evening held a "scoping meeting" at the Ramada Inn on Route 206 to gather public comments.

Alisa M. Lykens, an environmental biologist with FERC, noted that the project "is still in the design phase." She said the regulatory commission, which is charged with determining whether or not proposed interstate pipeline projects are necessary, wants to learn about issues concerning the expansion plan before Transco's application is filed in August.

Lykens said FERC is also continuing to accept written comments about the proposed project.

Alex J. Dankanich with the U.S. Department of Transportation Office of Pipeline Safety and representatives from Transco also attended Tuesday night's meeting.

Transco, which operates a natural gas pipeline system between the Texas Gulf Coast and New York City, is planning to build the new 3.5-mile pipeline that would run through Bordentown and Mansfield townships to meet regional service needs by connecting sections of an existing 36-inch diameter pipeline.

Transco officials considered several different routes for the expansion, including two on the west side of the New Jersey Turnpike near the Williamsburg Village neighborhood, and three on the east side near an existing utility corridor.

The company's preferred route "is a variation of one of the routes on the east side," according to Transco officials, who said the route was moved closer to the Turnpike, within an existing Public Service Electric and Gas easement, in response to comments from township officials and residents. The preferred route is not yet final and may still be altered, company officials said. Meanwhile, township officials have voiced concern about the effect the expansion plan would have on residents, the municipality's open space program, and future commercial growth in the area. Concerns about construction noise, safety and property values have also been raised. Only three people from the public spoke during Tuesday night's meeting.

Julie Gandy, Burlington County's open space coordinator, echoed concerns raised by township officials about a roughly 70-acre horse farm off Old York Road that has been protected under the farmland preservation program, and a 90-acre site that fronts Georgetown Road that was preserved as open space.

Committeeman George Chidley reread a list of questions about the project he posed to Transco officials during last week's committee meeting. They included questions about the total number of

acres that would be affected by the project, the amount of soil that would be displaced, what the environmental impact would be, what steps would be taken to control dust and noise during construction, and what would be the duration of the project.

Williamsburg Village resident Pat Lovas said she opposes any plans that would put the pipeline on her side of the highway, a sentiment that has been voiced by fellow neighborhood residents. After the meeting, Mayor Gerald Boyer said the township committee remains concerned about Transco's plans.

Boyer, Chidley and other local, county and state officials toured the proposed expansion site with FERC representatives and Transco officials Tuesday afternoon.

"We haven't gotten enough information nor seen a proposed route that would be satisfactory," he said.

FERC is planning to prepare an environmental assessment of the proposed expansion project and additional comments will be accepted, Lykens said. After the report is completed, FERC will gather comments for another 30 days before the commission determines whether or not to grant approval, she said.