



PHOTOS BY CARL KOSOLA / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Residents hold signs outside the Manchester Township Municipal Building on Tuesday to protest the proposed natural gas pipeline.

## PIPELINE HEARING

# 'We don't want this'

More than 200 residents attended a hearing on a proposed natural gas pipeline.

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STAFF WRITER

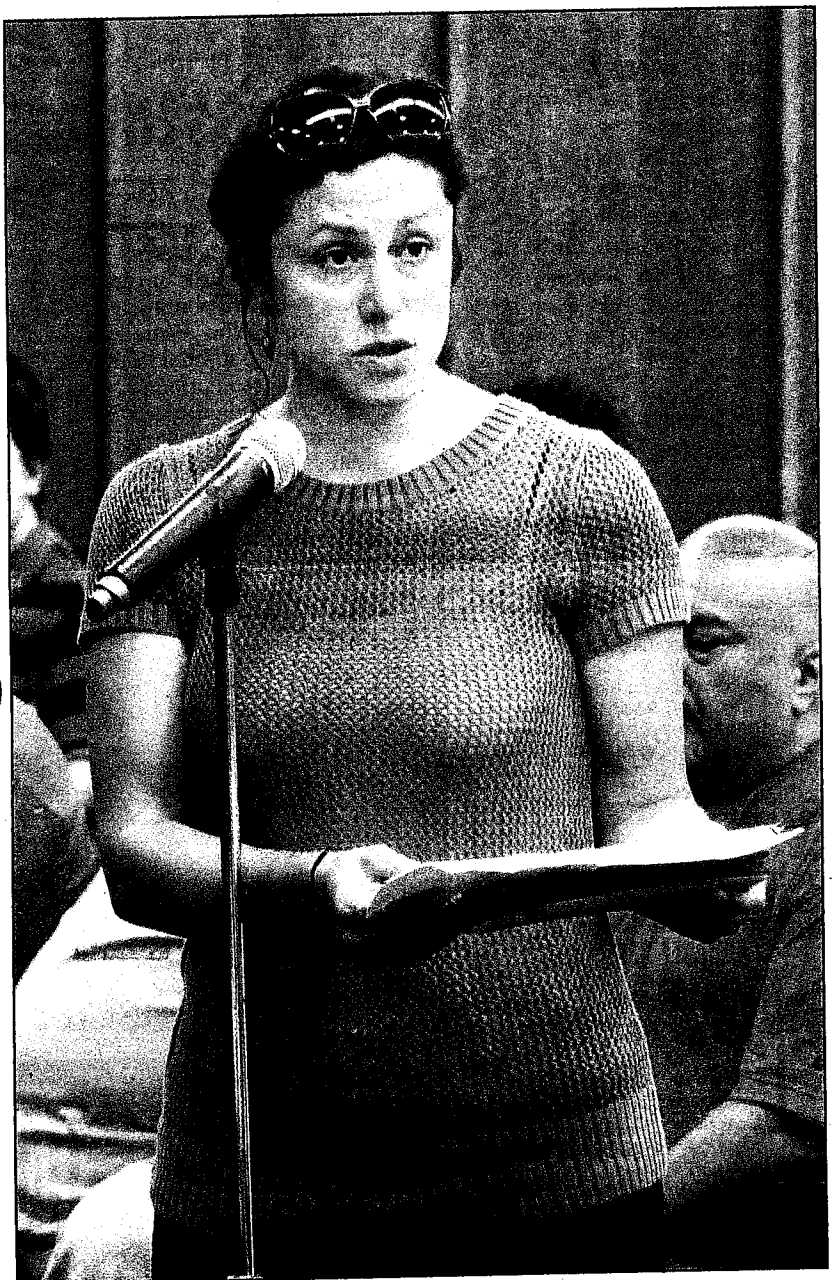
MANCHESTER — Residents and other stakeholders finally got the chance to have their say on New Jersey Natural Gas' proposed 28-mile transmission pipeline through northern Burlington, Monmouth and Ocean counties.

More than 200 people crammed into the meeting room of the municipal building of this Ocean County community on Tuesday for two public hearings on the company's proposal, which is undergoing a review by the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities.

The majority of those in attendance spoke against the controversial project and urged the BPU to reject it because of safety and environmental concerns.

"We don't want this pipeline. We don't need this pipeline. And we're counting on you to do the responsible thing and reject this pipeline," Carol Gay, president of the New Jersey State Industrial Union Council, said during the afternoon hearing.

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Jaclyn Rhoads, the assistant executive director of the Pinelands Preservation Alliance, speaks during Tuesday's meeting.

# Pipeline

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BPU Commissioner Dianne Solomon presided over the hearing. Also participating were representatives from New Jersey Natural Gas, the state's Division of Rate Counsel, and staff members from the BPU.

Although the two hearings were originally scheduled this month as the only opportunities for residents and interested parties to testify on the controversial project, Solomon announced at the onset that a third hearing would be held Aug. 26 at Rowan College of Burlington County in Mount Laurel.

The additional hearing was requested by 8th District Sen. Dawn Marie Addiego and Assembly members Chris J. Brown and Maria Rodriguez-Gregg, also of the 8th District.

Among the dozens who testified Tuesday were representatives of environmental groups opposed to the project, several trade unions in favor of it, and scores of residents from towns along the proposed route who fear it will pose a major safety risk.

The company's route would go through Chesterfield, North Hanover, Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, and several towns in Ocean and Monmouth counties.

New Jersey Natural Gas lawyer John Valeri testified that the 30-inch, high-pressure line is needed to provide a second major transmission feed to the company's service area, which is predominantly in Ocean and Monmouth counties. It also includes parts of the joint base and small sections of Morris and Middlesex counties and Bass River in Burlington County.

Currently, the company's system relies on a single transmission line connecting in Middlesex County.



CARL KOSOLA / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER  
New Jersey Board of Public Utilities Commissioner Dianne Solomon listens Tuesday during a public hearing on the proposed natural gas pipeline through northern Burlington County and other parts of New Jersey.

"Creating a second major transmission line will support safe, reliable and resilient delivery of natural gas to our service area," Valeri said. "This is essential."

Environmental groups argued against the necessity of the pipeline and claimed the utility company has made statements indicating the line's true purpose is to increase the supply of natural gas to Ocean County in anticipation of more development there.

The groups also said that the project would support environmentally harmful hydraulic drilling, called "fracking," and that the pipeline route could impact preserved farms and the protected Pinelands Reserve, which is home to rare and endangered plants and animals.

"New Jersey Natural Gas has not demonstrated this pipeline is necessary or even desirable for maintaining or safeguarding the region's natural gas supplies," said Jaclyn Rhoads, of the Southampton-based Pinelands Preservation Alliance. "Ratepayers should not be charged and natural resources threatened by a project that is not necessary for the public welfare."

"This is just a speculative pipeline to sell gas

wherever they want it to go," added Jeff Tittel, director of the New Jersey Sierra Club. "Please don't frack the farms of Burlington County. Please don't frack the Pinelands."

Supporters of the project said ensuring there is reliable and resilient energy was crucial to the region, including the joint base and the shore towns.

"If we learned anything from Superstorm Sandy, it was the importance of resiliency," Long Beach Township Mayor Joe Mancini said.

Matt White, of the International Union of Operating Engineers, said the pipeline would create over 1,000 construction jobs and provide reliable energy to the region and joint base.

"New Jersey can't see economic growth without

the basic infrastructure companies need," White said. "And whether you know it or not, the joint base is the biggest provider of jobs for both Ocean and Burlington counties."

Such support for the project was mostly drowned out by opposition from residents and officials of the towns along the line. Several cited the company's request for a waiver of the BPU's regulation restricting construction of high-pressure natural gas lines in close proximity to homes and buildings.

"My family and 140 other families live within 100 feet (of the proposed line). Why are we expendable?" Plumsted resident Jim Kelleher said about the possible impact of a natural gas explosion. "My house will be a crater. My wife and children will be gone."

Valeri said the pipeline would be built according to the most stringent state and federal standards, and would include automatic shutoff valves and other safety measures. It would also be inspected monthly.

Residents testified that the safety precautions were not enough.

Kathy Santaniello, of Chesterfield, said her home is about 100 feet away and her water well is even closer.

"That's a problem," Santaniello said. "It's too, too close."

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