

Ed Lloyd, state Pinelands Commission member, targeted by Christie's administration



At stake is a controversial plan to build a 22-mile natural gas pipeline through the Pinelands to the BL England power plant in Cape May County. / Kirk Moore/staff photo

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Gov. Chris Christie's administration struck back at its opponents on the state Pinelands Commission on Friday when one member, Ed Lloyd, was barred from participating in the commission deliberations on a controversial plan to allow a natural gas pipeline through the forest zone.

People present at the commissioners' monthly meeting in Pemberton Township said the message from the State Ethics Commission, delivered by a deputy state attorney general, was Lloyd must be recused from the proceedings because of his association with the Eastern Environmental Law Clinic, one of a number of groups that have written letters to the commission calling for more public hearings on the gas project.

Lloyd is an attorney and college professor specializing in environmental law — and one of a bloc of commissioners who seek to put the brakes on the proposed pipeline agreement. With a possible vote Jan. 10 on the plan, pipeline backers and their allies are trying to line up support for what could be a close vote on the 15-member board that regulates land use and environmental protection in seven counties.

"It was a deputy attorney general who asked for the recusal. There's a complete lack of due process," said Doug O'Malley of New Jersey Environment, who watched Friday from the audience. "This whole process of making a commissioner opposed to the pipeline step away from the debate does not look good."

"There is no claim of financial conflict here," Carleton Montgomery of the Pinelands Preservation Alliance wrote in a letter after the meeting to commission chairman Mark Lohbauer. "Instead the claim seems to be based on an undefined problem arising from Mr. Lloyd's role on the board of the Eastern Environmental Law Center." An employee of the center had written the commission requesting a change in the public hearing schedule.

At stake is a proposed legal agreement, technically called a memorandum of agreement, or MOA, between the Pinelands Commission and the state Board of Public Utilities, to permit construction of a 22-mile, high-capacity gas pipeline from Maurice River Township east to the BL England power station in upper Cape May County.

The pipeline would be buried mostly along existing highway rights of way, such as Route 49, and enable the old coal-burning plant to be rebuilt as a modern gas-fired turbine power station.

Advocates contend that will help replace regional power generation when the Oyster Creek nuclear reactor in Lacey goes offline permanently, as expected in 2019.

But opponents contend its an abuse of the MOA to get around a long-standing Pinelands rule against new transmission pipelines, chiefly to benefit South Jersey Gas and power plant owner Rockland Capital.

Friday's meeting was backed with supporters, especially members of South Jersey construction labor unions who stand to get good jobs from the pipeline, and opponents ranging from conservation groups to homeowners afraid of having the high-pressure gas line near their houses. Also, there were air quality officials with the state Department of Environmental Protection, who touted the lower emissions of gas plants.

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