

South Jersey Gas pipeline proposal gets little love at public hearings



Ben Fogletto / Staff Photographer

Jeff Tittel, director of NJ Sierra Club, makes a statement during a public hearing Wednesday, June 17, 2015, on a proposal by South Jersey Gas to build a pipeline through the Pinelands. Tittel spoke at the first of two hearings held at the Upper Township Community Center. (The Press of Atlantic City / Ben Fogletto)

UPPER TOWNSHIP – The pope, lipstick-wearing pigs and people incinerated to a crisp were images evoked by speakers Wednesday at two public hearings held by the Board of Public Utilities on a petition by South Jersey Gas to build a pipeline through the Pinelands.

“Even the pope in Rome has come out this week calling these fossil fuels ‘sinners,’ ” said Georgina Shanley, representing the five-county Citizens United for Renewable Energy, as she

implored the board to deny a proposal to convert the outdated coal--burning B.L. England Generating Station to natural gas.

Shanley was among those who spoke against a proposed, 22-mile-long pipeline that would cut through the Pinelands as it was extended from Maurice River Township to the Beesleys Point section of the township.

About 75 people attended the 3:30 p.m. meeting, which was delayed a half-hour by the late arrival of the presiding BPU commissioner, and several who signed up to speak at the first meeting were forced to wait until the second meeting began at 6 p.m. to say their piece. About half as many people attended the second meeting.

“You can’t put lipstick on a pig but apparently you can put it on a pipeline,” said Doug O’Malley, director of Environment New Jersey. He called the amended application submitted by South Jersey Gas “an end run around the Pinelands Commission,” which deadlocked 7-7 on the utility’s proposal in January 2014.

“Our problem is we’re toast,” said Bob Allen, a resident of the Seaville section of the township, focusing on the potential danger the pipeline poses to residents and businesses located along its path should it explode. “We’re incinerated.”

Allen said the township fuel depot, where kerosene, diesel and gasoline are stored, is a short distance from the pipeline’s proposed interconnect station in Tuckahoe.

In all, nine people spoke against the pipeline at the first meeting and four supported it. Among those in favor was Charles Hill, business manager for IBEW Local 210 at B.L. England, who said he supported the pipeline for preserving and creating jobs, for providing cleaner-burning fuel and for increasing energy reliability in the region.

The first three speakers at the second meeting spoke against the proposal.

Public comment, which was the intent of the hearing, was further delayed another half-hour at the first meeting as counsel for South Jersey Gas elicited testimony from a South Jersey Gas general manager as to the necessity of the pipeline.

That practice, BPU Commissioner Joseph Fiordaliso said, is usually part of evidentiary hearings, not public hearings. At the request of Ocean City resident Gayle Davidson, who spoke against the pipeline on behalf of children who cannot represent themselves in such matters, the witness testimony portion of the second meeting was disallowed.

Most of those who spoke against the pipeline said the energy demand in South Jersey does not warrant converting B.L. England, which was originally scheduled to close by this month, from occasional use to constant use.

“This is a ratepayer ripoff,” said Jeff Tittel, director of the NJ Sierra Club. “We’re going to pay for a plant that’s not necessary but it’s going to pollute its own neighborhood.”