

# Proposed 22-mile Pinelands gas line draws opposition

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**PEMBERTON TOWNSHIP** — A proposed 22-mile natural gas pipeline through the Pine Barrens would enable conversion of the aging B.L. England Generating Station to gas from coal and fuel oil, and help offset the loss of electrical generation when the Oyster Creek nuclear reactor closes in 2019, according to state utilities regulators.

But clean-energy and environmental activists want none of it, and they crowded a meeting of the state Pinelands Commission on Friday to say so, arguing the project would use gas from hydraulic fracturing wells in Pennsylvania that their movements oppose.

"That's dirty gas," said Victor Maene, a resident opposed to the gas line. "All the electrical infrastructure is there to do a huge wind farm at Beesley's Point.... That location is heaven-sent for a wind farm."

The hulking power plant and stack are a familiar landmark for travelers to Cape May County, standing on the south bank of the Egg Harbor River west of the Garden State Parkway. Atlantic City Electric, formerly called Conectiv, sold the plant in 2006 and owners RC Cape May Holdings are planning to replace the coal- and oil-fired power sources. Officials for the state Department of Environmental Protection said converting to gas would be a net environmental benefit by improving air quality, a point disputed by activists.

"They have to make this decision to re-power by the end of 2013. So this thing is on the fast track," said Georgina Shanley of the Ocean City-based Citizens United for Renewable Energy.

**OPEN** The state Board of Public Utilities and South Jersey Gas need permission from the Pinelands Commission, a 15-member land use and environmental board. New pipelines are not a normally permitted use in the commission's forest area zoning, and the 24-inch diameter pipeline would go underground for 14 miles through the forest alongside Route 49, from Millville to Tuckahoe.

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The BPU "has among its other responsibilities ensuring safe, adequate utility service at reasonable rates. ... The board recognizes we are not the final forum on what happens," Jerry May, who leads the BPU's energy division, told the Pinelands commissioners. May made an additional pitch for the pipeline: it would serve as a backup supply for the 63,000 gas customers in Cape May County and "we want the increased reliability."

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