

The Merrimack public hearing with Kinder Morgan representatives on the proposed natural gas pipeline route through town, March 26, 2015.

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Questioning need, safety of pipeline

By TINA FORBES

Staff Writer

MERRIMACK – Questioning the need and safety of a proposed natural gas pipeline transmission line in Merrimack, several hundred residents turned out for a public hearing with Kinder Morgan representatives Thursday.

Town officials and police were a part of the meeting, which included a presentation by Kinder Morgan describing the company and the proposed pipeline.

The project is still in a pre-filing phase and has not set a concrete route, though the proposed route would run through about 4.5 miles of Merrimack, affect 61 landowners and cross through Gilmore Hill Memorial Forest and Horse Hill Nature Preserve.

Kinder Morgan development director, Curtis Cole, said the project is in response to demand in the area for more energy. Cole said the natural gas infrastructure in the area is already strained, and the project would bring energy prices down.

"Only Hawaii has higher energy prices than you do," he said.

Representatives said they have been operating in the state for 60 years, and currently has 50 miles of pipe in the state, which generates \$1.7 million in taxes.

Residents questioned the need.

Deb Huffman said New Hampshire has enough natural gas proposals to fulfill their needs through existing infrastructure.

"Yours is the only company that wants to dig a brand new trench, cutting across the city, cutting across people's lands, their farms, the nature reserves. With all these other projects being proposed that will provide abundant gas, why in the world would anyone support your project?"

Cole said after studies, Kinder Morgan felt there would be less of an impact with the proposed project versus using existing lines.

"We respond to what our customers request. We will build to what we have market for," he said, adding the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, or FERC, would prohibit a project being built without a corresponding need.

If the project is approved, an additional \$11.2 million in taxes would go to New Hampshire towns, according to Kinder Morgan. About half a million would go to Merrimack.

Cole said distributors, such as Liberty Utilities, are looking into expanding natural gas in the area to meet demand.

Resident Bruce Bradshaw worried the pipeline would put the town's drinking water at risk.

"I would rather pay the higher prices than be concerned about the safety for the town of Merrimack," he said.

Some residents spoke in favor of the project because of the rise in energy prices. Others were concerned with the environmental impact.

George May of the Souhegan Watershed Association was concerned with the environmental impact, particularly of the area rivers.

"(Souhegan) is a protected river in the state of New Hampshire. (The map) shows you crossing the river four times around Souhegan High School, which seems insane to me," he said.

He said the Merrimack River is another protected river. "All of this is going to require extreme caution," said May.

The proposed Merrimack pipeline would be only a segment of the Northeast Energy Direct Project developed by the Tennessee Gas Pipeline Co., a subsidiary of Kinder Morgan.

The pipeline's proposed route would enter the state in Cheshire County and heads east into Hillsborough County, going through Greenville, Mason, Brookline, Milford, Amherst and Merrimack, crossing under the Merrimack River into Litchfield and Londonderry before heading to Dracut, Mass., to meet with a compression station.

Originating in Pennsylvania, the gas line would travel through New York, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and back to Massachusetts. The pipeline does not have an access point in Merrimack.

An earlier proposal would have built the route through Hollis, including the Beaver Brook Association, but the plan was nixed following opposition from residents and officials.

Tina Forbes can be reached at 594-6402, tforbes@nashuatelegraph.com or @Telegraph_TinaF.