

## Salem residents, officials oppose natural gas pipeline

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SALEM — Tempers flared Wednesday night as selectmen and residents grilled company officials about a proposal to extend a natural gas line through town.

For nearly two hours, one angry resident after another stepped up to the podium in the packed Town Hall meeting room to question the four representatives of Tennessee Gas Pipeline Co.

But perhaps the harshest criticism came from selectmen, especially James Keller. He lives in the Hunters Run neighborhood that would be affected by the 2-mile extension through Salem.

Selectmen, along with residents, were upset the company provided them with few if any details about the proposed project. That included the route of the 16-inch-wide underground line.

"I'm trying to understand where it's actually going to go," Keller said. "You may want to tell us where it's going to go before you contact landowners — we represent them."

The project calls for the extension of a natural gas distribution system as part of a \$6 billion-dollar project stretching from Pennsylvania to New Hampshire.

A third gas line would be installed adjacent to two previous lines. One was installed in the 1950s and the other was put in during the late 1980s, project manager Mark Hamarich said. It also passes through Methuen and Haverhill.

The new line is part of the 416-mile project Northeast Energy Direct Project expected to pass through five states and meet an increased demand for natural gas, lowering costs for customers, according to company officials.

"It's addressing the long-term natural gas needs of the region," spokesman Allen Fore said.

Construction is scheduled to begin in January 2017 and conclude in November 2018. The gas would be distributed locally by Liberty Utilities. Tennessee Gas is a subsidiary of Houston-based Kinder Morgan Energy Partners.

The company recently filed a request for approval with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. It has encountered strong opposition from communities where the line would be installed.

Keller has said he didn't know about the project until he and neighbors recently found information on their doors indicating the line could pass through their yards. He then told fellow selectmen, who had not heard of the project.

"If you want to talk about public relations, you blew it in my mind," Selectman Everett McBride Jr. said.

He said the company should not underestimate the influence of town officials in opposing the project on behalf of the community.

"We do have input, we do have influence," he said. "You may not be happy, but we want to make the residents happy."

Tennessee Gas representatives said they want to survey a 400-foot corridor along Hunters Run and Bounty Court and conduct test borings.

Selectman and residents were angry when company representatives said they could not provide detailed maps of the gas line's proposed route, which crosses Route 128 at one point. During the meeting, residents passed around copies of town tax maps showing the route.

"This meeting is more of a joke than anything," said David Blatti of 21 Hunters Run. "They have no information."

One of the 10 members of the audience to speak said he didn't realize the line would cross his property until he saw a map at the meeting.

"I have no information about this project," said Mike McCarthy of 9 Bounty Court. "It's quite a shock."

Mike Clohecy of 22 Hunters Run urged neighbors to oppose the gas line.

"I'm not giving approval and I urge everyone to do the same," he said.

Some told of how they protested against a similar proposal in 1996.

Selectmen, residents and Town Manager Keith Hickey questioned why they couldn't replace an existing gas line with a second larger line instead of installing a third.

Conservation Commission member Linda Harvey explained the project would cross one of the town's most pristine wetlands behind Diamond Avenue.

Selectmen's Chairman Patrick Hargreaves asked if the town and residents had the power to prevent the project. He was told the company would negotiate with landowners to reach an agreement but FERC had the right to take property by eminent domain if it was found to be in the public's best interest.

Hargreaves recommended residents contact their lawmakers about the project. Keller suggested the company use existing corridors instead of residents' property.

"It is negligent to purport to be planning without looking at those alternatives," he said.