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FERC denies rehearing request on Algonquin pipeline expansion

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Several hundred residents packed the Sept. 15, 2014 public hearing on the Algonquin pipeline expansion project at the Muriel Morabito Community Center in Cortlandt Manor. (Photo: Matthew Brown / The Journal News) Buy Photo

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) has rejected opponents' request to revisit its approval of the controversial Algonquin natural pipeline expansion project.

The decision was a blow to [northern Westchester community](#) members who have been trying to reverse the federal approval, citing, among other concerns, their belief that the pipeline is too close to the Indian Point nuclear power plant in Buchanan.

"I'm very disappointed on behalf of my community," said Cortlandt town Supervisor Linda Puglisi, who, along with Town Board members, had asked the federal agency to reexamine its approval, granted in March. "They basically disregarded all of our concerns and all of our issues, and once again, rubber stamped the approval of this large expansion of a natural gas pipeline that goes through our town, through northern Westchester, going up Northeast, and it really doesn't benefit anybody in our community. It just devastates a lot of our land."

The rerouted 42-inch pipeline would pass only 500 feet away from Buchanan-Verplanck Elementary School, which serves part of Cortlandt, she noted.

Spectra Energy's Algonquin Incremental Market (AIM) project is set to expand existing pipeline systems in New York and three other states to carry more natural gas north from Pennsylvania's Marcellus Shale. The project, under construction now, will replace parts of the pipeline as well as run a new section through Stony Point, under the Hudson River and into Verplanck and Buchanan.

[Opponents](#) — including Stop the Algonquin Pipeline Expansion and Riverkeeper — argued in their rehearing request that the commission improperly relied on a U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission's report that concluded that a potential rupture of the proposed pipeline poses no threat to the safe operation or safe shutdown of the Indian Point nuclear plant. An independent analysis should have been conducted based on the challenges posed by the project, they said.

In its decision issued Thursday, the commission disagreed with the opponents, saying that the NRC is the "expert authority and enforcing agency for evaluating and ensuring the safe operation of nuclear facilities, including risk associated with external factors."

Marylee Hanley, the pipeline's spokeswoman, said in a statement that she was pleased with the federal agency's reaffirmation of its approval.

"Algonquin will continue with its construction, in accordance with the FERC certificate, to meet the project's critical construction timeframes and safely transport additional supplies of clean, reliable, domestic natural gas to heat the region's homes and businesses," she said.

The fact that it took more than nine months for FERC to issue its rejection allowed the pipeline project to proceed without legal challenges, complained Courtney Williams of Peekskill, vice president of Safe Energy Rights Group.

"While local municipalities and residents were waiting for FERC's decision, Spectra was allowed to seize private property by eminent domain and proceed with destruction of homes, roads, and parklands," she said.

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