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West Roxbury pipeline approved by federal regulators



SCOTT EISEN FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Protesters demonstrated against the natural gas pipeline project in West Roxbury in January.

By Jack Newsham | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT MARCH 04, 2015

The Algonquin Incremental Market natural gas project, which would build a five-mile spur through West Roxbury, will face a legal battle in Massachusetts after being approved by federal regulators.

In a ruling posted online Tuesday, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission granted the Houston pipeline company Spectra Energy Corp. permission to move ahead with the project, which would increase the capacity of New England's biggest natural gas pipeline by 300 million cubic feet of gas per day, Spectra has said.

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But US Representative Stephen Lynch, a South Boston Democrat whose district includes the proposed West Roxbury pipeline, said opponents would seek an injunction to stop construction.

"We've reached out to a couple of [state] governmental departments that would have sufficient legal firepower to engage in such a lawsuit," Lynch said. "It's uphill. There's no question about it. But I think the fight is worth fighting, and I think we're right."

It wasn't clear Wednesday what the next steps would be. Before construction begins, the ruling said, Spectra must file detailed building and environmental protection plans.

New York state regulators also are reviewing Spectra's proposal for construction in that state, but winning the FERC's approval was the most significant legal hurdle.

The project has faced opposition from environmental and community groups, and national activists have raised concerns that it would lead to an increase in a controversial form of natural gas drilling called hydraulic fracturing, or fracking. West Roxbury residents have protested a portion of the project that entails laying pipe adjacent to an urban quarry where explosives are regularly detonated, but the commission rejected suggestions that the project would be unsafe.

"Spectra and FERC have ignored our requests and simply paid lip service to our concerns about safety," said Paul Horn of West Roxbury, a leader of the group Stop the West Roxbury Lateral. "We are disappointed, but not surprised."

In addition, Rhode Island activists said they would begin a multiday, 28-mile march on Wednesday to protest pipeline construction in that state.

Other politicians have voiced their disapproval, too. Senators Elizabeth Warren and Ed Markey cosigned a letter with Lynch warning of “serious consequences” if the pipeline is approved too hastily, and Boston Mayor Martin J. Walsh and city councilors have said they oppose the pipeline expansion. Spokesmen for Walsh and Markey on Wednesday said that they were still reviewing the federal order.

The West Roxbury spur is a small part of the overall project. Spectra plans to lay a total of 37 miles of pipeline, most of it in a 20-mile stretch from New York to Connecticut that will go under the Hudson River. It also plans to install six pumping stations to pressurize the pipeline. The total cost projected by Spectra is \$971 million, to be paid for by gas companies.

In a statement, Spectra said it was pleased with the commission’s decision but would not say more until it had fully reviewed the 66-page document. The company has said it hopes to complete construction by November 2016.

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