

Feds set public meetings on pipeline report

Six hearings are to be held in area, so public can comment on PennEast project's impact

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The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission will hold a meeting in Bethlehem next month to collect comments on a draft environmental impact statement for the PennEast Pipeline project that will cut through Northampton County.

In addition to being able to make comments online, the commission on Monday announced six public meetings in mid-August, each taking place from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. to collect verbal comments on the draft document.

There will be no formal presentation by FERC during the meetings.

Verbal comments will be recorded by stenographers in one-on-one settings and transcripts will be placed into the docket for the project and be made available for public view on FERC's eLibrary system, a notice issued by the commission said.

The Bethlehem meeting will take place Aug 15 at the Best Western Lehigh Valley

Conference Center at 300 Gateway Drive A meeting at Penn's Peak near Jim Thorpe will also be held the same day.

Other meetings will be held Aug 16-17 in Lahaska, Bucks County, and Wilkes-Barre, Luzerne County. In New Jersey, there will be meetings in Hampton and Ewing.

The nearly 1,200 page document describing potential environmental impacts from the proposed pipeline and ways to minimize those impacts was released Friday on the FERC website. Public comments will be accepted until Sept. 12. The project includes about 115 miles of new pipeline and an additional three miles of laterals.

The draft report says FERC determined construction and operation of the pipeline would result in "some adverse environmental impacts, but impacts would be reduced to less-than-significant levels with the implementation of PennEast's proposed and FERC staff's recommended mitigation measures."

A final report will be released in December, with approval for the project expected sometime next year.

Oponents of the project have criticized the amount of time the public has to comment on the draft statement. They noted a separate summary of the project



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The proposed PennEast pipeline has drawn opposition throughout the region.

says the deadline is Sept 12, but the actual report says the deadline is Sept 5.

The FERC website has also been down intermittently since shortly after the report was released on Friday, said Delaware Riverkeeper Maya van Rossum.

On Monday, Celeste Miller, a FERC spokeswoman, confirmed the deadline for public comment is Sept. 12. She did not immediately respond to questions about how long the website was down or if FERC

would extend the comment deadline because of the outage.

Miller did say that FERC put out a notice last week alerting users that the website would be down for maintenance from 11 p.m. Friday until 3 a.m. Saturday.

Delaware Riverkeeper Maya van Rossum said she noted the website was down around 1 p.m. Friday, a couple hours after FERC released the report. She continued to receive multiple reports Monday of others still having issues accessing the site and posting comments.

FERC shouldn't have released any new reports for public comment during a time when they knew there would be site maintenance, van Rossum said. She also criticized the fact that the comment period is during what is a popular vacation time for most individuals, and she believes most people will not have enough time to review the lengthy document in the amount of time provided.

To view the draft, visit: http://elibrary.ferc.gov/idmws/file-list.asp?accession_num=20160722-4001

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