

## Fort urges assessing oil risks

By Ryan Whisner Union regional editor | Posted: Friday, November 7, 2014 9:49 am

The Fort Atkinson City Council waded into a hot topic Thursday when it voted to urge the state Department of Natural Resource to complete a full environmental assessment of Enbridge Energy Co.'s Pipeline 61, which is located along the southern portion of the city.

Enbridge Energies' Line 61 runs through Wisconsin from Superior to Illinois, crossing into Jefferson County near Waterloo. It travels through the southwestern corner of the county, crossing beneath the Rock River south of Fort Atkinson and just north of Lake Koshkonong.

Currently, it carries approximately 400,000 barrels of tar sands oil from Alberta, Canada, per day, but the company plans to increase the pipeline's capacity up to 1.2 million barrels per day by 2015 through construction of several additional pumping stations along the line, including a new one outside of Waterloo in Dane County.

The expansion would make Line 61 have a greater capacity than the proposed Keystone XL pipeline going from western Canada to the Gulf of Mexico.

As unanimously approved Thursday, the resolution urges the DNR to prepare a full environmental impact statement on the proposed pipeline expansions "in order to ensure the safety of our natural resources and the public welfare of residents of the City of Fort Atkinson and surrounding communities" In addition, a copy of the resolution is to be sent to the governor, the DNR secretary and Fort Atkinson's state legislators.

"The resolution does not put us on record as absolutely against the pipeline," Fort Atkinson City Council President Dick Schultz said. "What it is saying is, 'we want the DNR to do due diligence.' You have a pipe designed for 400,000 barrels and now they want to pump 1.2 million barrels per day. I would hope they would get the opinion of experts and not just from Enbridge."

Schultz said he believed it was important for the council to state that.

"The damage of a spill just on land to ground water and to the land is one thing, but if that pipe, where it goes under the Rock River, were to break, what kind of catastrophe would that be for this area?" he said.

Schultz reiterated that the resolution was simply urging the DNR to do due diligence and was not a stand by the council for or against the pipeline itself.

The concept of the resolution had been brought forth to the council at its Oct. 21 meeting by University of Wisconsin-Whitewater assistant geography and geology professor Eric Compas.

Since May, similar resolutions have been passed by the Jefferson, Dane, Wood and Walworth county boards and the City of Whitewater.

Compas pointed out Thursday that U.S. Sen. Mitch McConnell has said that energy policy would be first on the agenda, including the approval of the Keystone XL pipeline.

“It’s amazing to me that we basically have the equivalent of the Keystone pipeline being proposed for the middle of our state and it is certainly not on the state radar and definitely not on the national radar,” Compas said. “Something of similar equivalency has gotten incredible scrutiny nationally and it is amazing to see how little public disclosure, transparency, has occurred on this pipeline. I think this poses a substantial risk to the community here, both in terms of the health risk if there was a spill.”

The prospect of a pipeline leak or spill, and the consequences it would have for neighboring homeowners, have been the chief concerns among those opposing the project upgrade.

The pipeline crossing Jefferson County was constructed in 2007, and carries petroleum made from oil sands from Alberta, Canada.

Enbridge officials have said that Line 61, a 42-inch buried pipeline, was constructed with the intention to move large amounts of oil sands through the region, but it has not operated at full capacity since its construction.

Additional permits are not needed to increase the pressure flowing through the pipeline at this point, because the infrastructure was approved to run up to 1.2 million barrels per day when it was constructed.

Though tar sands oil has been flowing through the pipeline since it was constructed in 2007, many contend that the possibility of a leak is that much greater as the pressure through the pipeline is increased to 1,200 pounds per square inch (psi) with the addition of the new pumping stations.

From 1999-2010, Enbridge has reported more than 800 pipeline-related spills or incidents, highlighted by a spill in 2010 in Marshall, Mich., that released 834,000 gallons of oil into the Kalamazoo River. That led to the most expensive onshore cleanup in U.S. history, which to this day still is not complete.

It was this type of record, and a fear that a similar spill could happen here, that led the Jefferson County Board of Supervisors to pass a resolution at its May 13 meeting opposing a state Department of Natural Resources permit for a separate portion of the project located in Superior, and to urge the company to hold a public hearing in Jefferson County.

Although the permit already has been approved by the DNR and Enbridge said the project will move forward no matter what, Dane and Walworth counties have passed similar resolutions. Following that, 18 Wisconsin state senators and representatives sent a letter urging Wisconsin DNR Secretary

Cathy Stepp to require that the Line 61 project undergo a full environmental assessment.

Compas hosted a public forum Thursday afternoon at UW-Whitewater on the topic (see related story on A1). Some of the same speakers at the forum also attended Fort Atkinson's council meeting to urge passage of the resolution.

Fort Atkinson native Elizabeth Ward of the John Muir Chapter of the Sierra Club urged support of the resolution.

"It's important to note that all the resolution is asking for is an analysis of the risks and the rewards we get from this pipeline," she said.

Ward suggested that after the analysis, it is possible Fort Atkinson and the state officials could decide the pipeline has higher benefits than negatives.

"The important thing is for us to really analyze that and know," she said. "We learned in Kalamazoo too late the impact of tar sands and oil spills and what can happen especially to local economies. We would hate for that to happen in Fort Atkinson or anywhere in the state, whether it be an impact on the Rock River or anywhere in the state."

Two representatives of 350 Madison, the Madison area branch of 350.org, a climate activities organization, also addressed the council.

Retired healthcare provider Mary Beth Elliot noted that she always focused on risk and benefits with her patients when considering care.

"The problem with risk and benefit is in any business, you have to think about this," she said. "In the case of Enbridge, in thinking about the risk and benefit, it is just like with the FDA (asking) 'is this drug going to kill one person for every 100 it helps?'"

Elliot said that in the case of Enbridge, she is concerned about the benzene proven to be present in tar sands spills. She said benzene is a highly volatile organic chemical compound that is a carcinogen. She pointed out that many people don't recognize that there are many different chemicals that make up the diluent for tar sands to get it to flow through the pipeline.

"Sometimes when there are chemicals that can't individually be harmful, the effects of them all together can be synergistic: you get even more than you are counting on," Elliot said.

Further, she noted that after four years, Enbridge has not finished cleaning up the Kalamazoo spill, having refused to pay for the final assessment.

Lastly, Elliot said, a report from the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) stated that tar sands oil is no more likely to cause a pipeline to rupture than regular crude oil. However, she said, NAS is setting up a study with Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) to determine if the impact of a tar sands oil spill is worse than crude oil.

Meanwhile, Carl Whiting, also of 350 Madison, pointed out that they were not asking the council members to be scientists; rather, they simply wanted the council to ask the DNR to do its due diligence to ensure the community is supported.

Whiting said every community he is aware of that has explored the issue has passed a similar resolution by a significant margin, if not unanimously.

“I think that maybe because if there is a spill in the community they don’t want to say we had some information but unlike other communities we chose not to look into it” he said.

Whiting also referenced the Kalamazoo spill, noting that the original environmental assessment in Wisconsin was for installation of the pipeline.

“It didn’t matter what was in the pipe,” he said. “Pipelines don’t spill pipelines; they spill their contents.”

Whiting said the content of tar sands oil is very unique.

He said in the Kalamazoo incident, more than 150 families have been relocated permanently. Comparatively, Whiting said, a spill from Line 61 could be six times greater than the Kalamazoo spill, based on the amount of tar sands oil being pumped through it.

Whiting said the two primary concerns are the uncertainty of knowing what chemicals people might be exposed to and the fact that it is not clear whether it is tar sands oil.

He said they are not asking to put Enbridge on trial, but, merely, for the environmental concerns to be considered.

Other speakers supporting the resolution included a woman from Marshall who lives near the new pumping station, a Fort Atkinson woman who said she feels people need to be aware of the dangers and a retired public health nurse from the Town of Aztalan who questioned where the state and local health department officials were in all of this in relation to the potential dangers of a spill.

Council member Leslie LaMuro, who was unable to attend the meeting, submitted a statement indicating that she was very much in favor of the resolution as written.

In addition, she went on to state that she believes the council should put the safety of the city’s residents before profits.

Prior to the vote, council member Davin Lescohier pointed out that such a resolution was largely ceremonial.

“The topic is really important to the environment,” he said. “The resolution itself, which we will send to the governor, the DNR and the appropriate legislators, is really sort of seen as a form letter.”

Lescohier, who has worked in a legislative office in the Capitol, said that what works best are the

personal letters from constituents.

“It is that phone call, doing exactly what you are doing here with those others (state or national representatives),” he said. “The resolution is largely ceremonial because oftentimes they are sort of ignored. It is those more personal contacts that go a long way.”