

Pipeline opponents urge support

By Randy Radtke Special to the Union | Posted: Friday, March 20, 2015 9:34 am

LAKE MILLS — Opponents of Enbridge Inc.'s expansion of Pipeline 61 began a concerted organizational effort to rally public support to their cause with an educational forum in Lake Mills on Thursday night.

The 90-minute forum, followed by an hour-long question-and-answer period, drew more than 200 area residents, who packed the Lake Mills Municipal Building Community Room.

The forum featured eight speakers who addressed a number of issues connected to the pipeline's expansion, ranging from eminent domain to health risks area residents might face if the pipeline ruptured and were exposed to what several called the "dangerous chemical mix" needed to pipe tar sands oil extracted in Alberta, Canada, through the pipeline, which would run from Superior through Dane, Jefferson, Rock and Walworth counties to a terminal near Pontiac, Ill., to connect with other pipelines operated by Enbridge.

According to Enbridge, the company completed Phase 1 of the expansion of the 42-inch pipeline last September. That expanded the pipeline's capacity from 400,000 to 560,000 barrels per day by adding new pumping equipment to pump stations in Superior and Vesper, building a new pumping station adjacent to an older facility in Sheldon and modifying and upgrading its pumping station in Delavan.

Opponents, though, are concerned with Enbridge's Phase 2 plans to take the pipeline to what the company says is the line's design capacity of 1.2 million barrels per day.

In order to do that, the company says it has to modify or construct 13 pumping stations in Wisconsin, including one in northeastern Dane County near Marshall, along with modifying or constructing three more pumping stations in Illinois.

The company says the project will not require any pipeline construction.



PIPELINE PROGRAM

PIPELINE PROGRAM — More than 200 area residents turned out in Lake Mills Thursday evening for an educational forum on Enbridge Energy's project to increase the flow of tar sands oil through a pipeline that runs through Dane, Jefferson, Rock and Walworth counties. — Photo by Randy Radtke.

After organizer Ronni Monroe welcomed the crowd, the stage for the next six speakers was set by Lori Van Caster, a community activist who lives closely to the pipeline in Dane County. She said it was fair to ask two questions: What's in the Enbridge pipeline and what risks are we looking at?

Chief among them, according to the Sierra Club's Elizabeth Ward, are the chemical mix needed to move tar sands oil through the pipeline and the possibility of a pipeline break, as one did in Michigan in the summer of 2010. The pipeline was owned and operated by Enbridge.

"Tar sands have a peanut butter-like consistency that has to be blended with chemicals in order to move it," said Ward. "It makes it more likely the pipeline will rupture because of the corrosive nature of those chemicals needed to dilute and pipe the tar sands."

Ward added that the Kalamazoo spill, the largest inland oil spill in the U.S., involved more than 1 million gallons and \$1 billion in cleanup costs. Thirty-five miles of the Kalamazoo River were adversely impacted by the pipeline rupture and parts of the 35-mile stretch were not reopened until 2012.

In March 2013, the EPA ordered Enbridge to continue the cleanup and dredge portions of the river to remove submerged oil and oil-contaminated sediment.

Ward said the expansion put at risk some of the state's key lakes and rivers.

"This affects some of our most important waterways, starting with Lake Superior, the Wisconsin and Rock rivers and Lake Koshkonong," Ward said.

She later questioned why the pipeline's expanded capacity was even needed given the fact that the nation is in an era of lower gas prices, more fuel-efficient vehicles and people driving less and less.

"What this is, Ward contended, "is a race to export this oil. The only way for us to stop this is for us to stand up. We don't need to become the superhighway of pipelines."

Mary Beth Elliot, a retired professor of pharmacology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, said there are considerable health risks involved with tar sand oil spills like the one in Michigan, and health officials there had done a good job of assessing the spill's impact on the health of area residents. She pointed to their assessment of two communities, and that 58 percent of those living in the affected community exhibited symptoms likely caused by exposure to tar sands and the chemical mix needed to move them, while in the nonaffected community, fewer than 5 percent of the population exhibited the same symptoms, which included coughing, headaches, nausea and worse.

She added that long-term exposure was more difficult to assess, but studies had shown that people living in Alberta, Canada, who lived near tar sand oil fields did have elevated numbers of blood and organ cancers.

Other speakers included Jefferson County Supervisor Walt Christensen of the Town of Koshkonong,

who recapped his efforts and those of the Jefferson County Board of Supervisors to slow down the project by passing a resolution last year asking that Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to deny an air quality permit Enbridge needed for work on its facilities in Superior related to the expansion project. While the resolution did lead to a public hearing and an informational meeting, the air quality permit was granted by the DNR and Enbridge continued its work on Phase 1.

Christensen said the county had “basically done everything we can do,” to slow down the pipeline’s capacity expansion.

“It’s a state and federal issue,” he said before urging area residents to keep up the pressure on elected officials at those two levels of government.

Dan Kilkenny, a Walworth County Board of Supervisors member and an attorney, addressed how landowners adjacent to the pipeline and its pumping stations would be impacted by eminent domain and how easements sought by Enbridge could impact property values.

Longtime environmental activist Peter Anderson urged local governments to consider ways they could hold companies like Enbridge financially accountable if there were a rupture and spill. He urged those listening not to give up.

“What we learned from Nebraska and the fight on the Keystone Pipeline over the last four years is that when people organize as a group, anything is possible,” he said “It’s tough to fight this on a one-on-one basis.”

Anderson’s comments allowed Carl Whiting, co-facilitator of the Wisconsin Safe Energy Alliance or WiSE, to finish making the case for people to join the effort to halt Enbridge’s project.

“The Kalamazoo spill occurred over 17 hours. The same amount that leaked there would be leaked from (Pipe)line 61 in 25 minutes,” he said. “Use your voice to save our beautiful state.”

Whiting urged those in attendance to fill out the volunteer cards handed out before the forum got under way. He also urged them to share their stories and concerns with a member of the WiSE, join the WiSE Alliance or Tar Sand-Free Midwest Facebook Groups, or contact Monroe, Van Caster or Ward to get further involved.

In addition, he encouraged the crowd to demand that the Obama administration give the Enbridge project the same scrutiny it had given the proposed Keystone Pipeline.

During the question-and-answer session that followed the forum, one area resident said he was disappointed that no one from Enbridge had attended the gathering.

The question allowed Monroe to restate what she had said in her welcoming remarks: “We invited them to come, but they declined to come and talk with you.”