

E&E Energywire

Md. pipeline approval draws fire over CO2, 'toxic burdens'

Carlos Anchondo, E&E News reporter

Published: Thursday, December 3, 2020



A home in Eden, Md., is pictured in this 2014 photo. The proposed Del-Mar natural gas pipeline is set to connect Eden and other Maryland communities to a wider pipeline network in Delaware, but the project has faced pushback from green groups and environmental justice advocates. Ken Lund/Flickr

A Maryland board approved a key state wetlands permit yesterday for a contested pipeline that would move natural gas to the state's Eastern Shore, sparking immediate pushback from environmental and civil rights groups that oppose the project.

The \$37 million Del-Mar pipeline mirrors national debates about environmental justice and climate issues surrounding many oil and gas pipeline projects, even though it isn't as large as some that have garnered attention.

The Line 3 oil project in the Midwest, for example, has also generated significant opposition on environmental justice grounds from Native groups like Honor the Earth ([*Energywire*](#), Nov. 24). Supporters of many pipeline projects, however, say they would boost economies and energy security in low-income and minority communities. The Maryland initiative, formally known as the Del-Mar Energy Pathway Project, is slated to move through sections of Delaware and Maryland and is targeting an in-service date of the fourth quarter of next year, [**according**](#) to Eastern Shore Natural Gas Pipeline Co., the developer.

The **permit** was approved in a 3-0 vote by the Maryland Board of Public Works. The company sought the license to drill under the Wicomico River in Salisbury, Md. In a **letter** Tuesday to the board urging denial of any permit for the project's build-out, the Chesapeake Climate Action Network (CCAN), the NAACP and dozens of state legislators said the "predominance of Environmental Justice (EJ)-eligible census block groups near the citing of the two proposed projects will place undue toxic burdens on these communities."

Laura Cofsky, a CCAN spokesperson, **pointed** to an analysis by the group indicating that the project runs mainly through "majority-minority and low-income communities."

"There is particularly high risk at the head of the Del-Mar project in the city of Salisbury," Cofsky said in an email, "which is where the developers are planning to site a 'renewable natural gas facility' — using waste from livestock, which is associated with a host of additional health threats."

"Building this pipeline will set back the state's climate goals while further burdening vulnerable communities on the Eastern Shore," added Anthony Field, CCAN's Maryland campaign coordinator.

In a release yesterday, CCAN said that although the board's vote does not guarantee the pipeline will be fully built, the organization and NAACP are "running out of options for fighting it."

The NAACP didn't respond to press inquiries yesterday.

GOP and industry counterattacks

On its website, Eastern Shore Natural Gas Pipeline said the project will, "for the first time, bring natural gas service to Somerset County, Maryland, one of only three counties in the state whose end users do not currently have access to environmentally friendly and affordable natural gas."

Similarly, in an op-ed this week in *The Baltimore Sun*, Maryland state Sen. Stephen Hershey Jr. (R) **said** the state's Eastern Shore needs the pipeline for economic reasons, and the arrival of natural gas in Somerset County "should be a cause for celebration."

"It's a bit rich to have residents of counties whose economies are thriving because of their access to modern infrastructure condemn a region for wanting the same infrastructure to enable economic development," Hershey wrote. "The only way to lift those census tracts out of poverty is to bring economic opportunity, that will come through infrastructure projects like this."

In a statement, Justin Mulcahy, a spokesman for the Chesapeake Utilities Corp., said the line offers "the choice to use environmentally beneficial and less expensive natural gas service, something elected officials and community leaders have advocated for over the last two decades." Eastern Shore Natural Gas Pipeline is a subsidiary of Chesapeake Utilities.

Lt. Gov. Boyd Rutherford, a Republican, voted in place of Gov. Larry Hogan (R), with Treasurer Nancy Kopp and Comptroller Peter Franchot — both Democrats — also backing the permit.

Rutherford said the project would stop dirtier energy from being used by two of its major customers — the University of Maryland, Eastern Shore, and Eastern Correctional Institute — including propane and the burning of tons of wood chips.

To install the 10-inch natural gas pipeline in the tidal wetlands, the Board of Public Works' wetlands administrator recommends a yearly compensation of \$190, according to the board's meeting agenda, to be "deposited into the [state Department of the Environment] Wetlands and Waterways Program Fund."

The Associated Press contributed.

Twitter: [@cjancho](https://twitter.com/cjancho) Email: canchondo@eenews.net