

Developers halt Va. natural gas pipeline

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The developers of a proposed natural gas pipeline in Virginia have suspended efforts to develop the project after a series of regulatory setbacks that could also jeopardize plans to build a major new natural gas power plant.

Chickahominy Pipeline LLC said it would pause the project while an affiliated company “evaluates next steps,” according to a statement. That related company, Chickahominy Power, is behind the proposed 1,600-megawatt Chickahominy power plant, which was set to be built in rural Charles City County, Va., and serviced by the pipeline.

Both moves stem from Eastern grid operator PJM Interconnection’s decision to drop the Chickahominy power plant from its interconnection queue. Without a spot in the queue, the project is no longer in line to supply power for the PJM grid region, which spans 13 states and the District of Columbia.

Citing Chickahominy’s failure to meet key development milestones, PJM asked federal regulators to allow it to remove the project from its queue in order to focus on other energy generation proposals that are further along in development. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission [authorized](#) PJM’s request last week.

“PJM declined to extend those milestones because Chickahominy has demonstrated no diligence or meaningful progress on the Chickahominy Project since entering the queue in October 2016,” lawyers for PJM [wrote](#) to FERC in January.

In light of the FERC order, Chickahominy said it needs “to press ‘pause’ on its pipeline efforts until its sole end-user, Chickahominy Power, is in a position to move forward.” The pipeline would move natural gas from Transco’s existing pipeline in Charlottesville to the planned power plant in Charles City County, according to the company’s website.

The announcement came days after another major Virginia project, the Mountain Valley pipeline, suffered a setback when the Army Corps of Engineers said it won’t make a decision on a key water permit for it in Virginia and West Virginia until another federal analysis is redone ([Energywire](#), Feb. 14).

Environmental and advocacy groups said the suspension of the Chickahominy pipeline is a sign that “fossil fuels are facing an uphill battle” in Virginia, noting the canceled Atlantic Coast pipeline from Dominion Energy Inc. and Duke Energy Corp.

“From the very beginning, Charles City County residents and climate advocates have been steadfast in our opposition to the Chickahominy Pipeline and its associated fracked gas plant,” Jorge Aguilar, the southern region director for Food & Water Watch, said in a statement.

However, Chickahominy and its parent company, Balico LLC, maintain that both the pipeline and the power plant are needed.

Authorized by the Virginia State Corporation Commission in 2018, the natural gas power plant would “fulfill a power need for this growing area, both in terms of population growth and technology infrastructure development,” Chickahominy spokesperson Beth Minear said in an email. The plant is not possible without the pipeline, Minear added.

Disputing PJM’s characterization of the project’s missed deadlines, Chickahominy told FERC last month that “several intersecting circumstances” outside of its control, including the coronavirus pandemic, had led to the power plant being delayed. In addition, the Virginia State Corporation Commission ruled in December that the Chickahominy pipeline would need a state permit known as a “certificate of public convenience and necessity,” despite Chickahominy’s claims that it was exempt from such a requirement.

“PJM’s unilateral notice of cancellation should be rejected as an unjust and unreasonable measure in light of the significant changed circumstances that have had material adverse effects upon the Chickahominy Project’s development timeline,” the company wrote in a [letter](#) to FERC.

Wanda Roberts, co-director of the grassroots group Concerned Citizens of Charles City County, said she hopes plans for the Chickahominy power plant are formally withdrawn. Another proposed gas project in the area, the 1,060-MW C4GT power plant from Michigan-based Novi Energy, was abandoned last year, Roberts added.