

https://richmond.com/news/local/a-total-loss-hanover-landowners-fearful-of-proposed-natural-gas-pipeline/article_5c30bfbb-c66a-5f6b-a83d-42a9c5dde41.html

BREAKING TOP STORY

'A total loss': Hanover landowners fearful of proposed natural gas pipeline

Holly Prestidge
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Catharine W. Tucker is photographed on Saturday, October 16, 2021 at her home in Hanover, Virginia. Tucker is one of many residents concerned about the pathway of a proposed natural gas pipeline.

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Catharine Tucker on what the proposed pipeline would mean to her

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Living in an "incineration zone" isn't the sort of comforting notion that'll lull anyone to sleep at night.

Hanover County property owners whose land is within the path of a proposed natural gas pipeline say the angst they're feeling continues to swell ever since hearing in recent weeks and months that Chickahominy Pipeline LLC is trying to move forward in its quest to build the pipeline across 45 miles of the county - from one end to the other - disturbing roughly 171 parcels.

Incineration zones, or blast zones, are geographic areas where there's a greater risk of combustion if the pipeline ruptures. But whether or how many homes or other structures are in those zones is unclear, as Chickahominy representatives and a lawyer for the company did not return emails or phone calls on Monday and Tuesday asking for such information.

Hanover's Board of Supervisors and county administration - as well as leadership in neighboring counties - openly shared their frustration last month with what they say is a lack of cooperation on Chickahominy's part to provide detailed information about

the pipeline.

County Administrator John Budesky said then that Hanover leaders only heard about the pipeline in July - the news coming from a constituent who'd received a letter from Chickahominy - and have since had very little contact with the company despite many attempts to obtain information and meet with Chickahominy representatives.

The pipeline would span a total of more than 80 miles, through five counties, with Hanover being affected the most geographically. It's proposed to start in Louisa, cut across Hanover and move through Henrico, New Kent and Charles City counties. It'll feed a power plant being proposed in Charles City, which would then provide electricity to a larger market.

The issue is working its way through the approval process at the State Corporation Commission. Chickahominy has requested that it doesn't need SCC approval because its gas is not being used for the public, but rather the very narrow purpose of operating the power plant. As recently as Oct. 8, however, SCC staff rejected Chickahominy's petition, saying that the company is trying to "subvert" state law and "escape regulation by creating a shell corporation."

Anyone who wished to file a notice of participation or a response to Chickahominy's original petition - asking that it not be SCC-regulated - had until Oct. 8 to do that. Hanover, along with Henrico and Louisa counties and others, filed such documents. Chickahominy now has until this Friday to respond to those participant responses.

In the meantime, at last Wednesday's supervisors' meeting, Budesky reiterated that he extended yet another invitation to Chickahominy representatives to participate in some way, whether showing up to the board meeting or holding a community meeting to answer the public's questions as well as their own.

"They have yet to respond after a substantial number of inquiries," Budesky said.

Catharine W. Tucker's nearly 77 wooded acres off U.S. 301 teems with life - birds and animals, tiny seedlings and blooming native plants and enormous trees - all beings she often talks to on her daily walks around her property. The land several miles south of Hanover Courthouse has been in her family since her parents bought it in the early 1960s and it was left to her when they died. She lives here now, in this place her mother used to call her "green cathedral" and for which parts of it likely haven't been touched since the Civil War.

Her heart breaks at the thought of an unknown entity cutting down wide swaths of her beloved forests for a pipeline that feeds corporate pockets elsewhere.

Pulling out her phone on a recent morning, Tucker pulled up a map of the proposed pipeline, which would cut diagonally through her property and across parts of her land where steep ravines dip more than 100 feet. Her research into pipeline construction in other states revealed that 24-inch pipeline construction, like that which Chickahominy wants to build, can require a cleared right-of-way as wide as 80 or 90 feet.

"Not only would it take trees, it would completely ruin the habitat," Tucker said of a cleared right of way. She's hoping a conservation easement she recorded in 2011 on her property offers some protection. The easement is held jointly by the Capital Region Land Conservancy and the Land Trust of Virginia. In short, the trusts will see that restrictions Tucker has placed on the property - including no development - will be upheld.

As Tucker used her walking stick to navigate the woods around her home, she named birds and plants, stopping to marvel at fuzzy mushrooms. She's come to know the wildlife, like the five kinds of woodpeckers that nest there regularly and the additional one that shows up for the winter. There are the deer, the occasional bear. She points out trees her father planted, and boxwoods her mother planted.

"I get to listen to the chatter between the wrens, and the chatter between the chickadees," she said. "That's one of the things I cherish about this place, to be able to be in one space long enough to learn it."

"Just considering the loss of it ..." she said, then paused, overcome for a moment. "I wouldn't be able to be here - it would be a total loss for the property."

Tucker is not alone.

Other landowners fearful for what may come addressed the Supervisors during the meeting last week. They all thanked the county for its response and advocacy on their behalf, then expressed how dire the situation has become for them, including two who mentioned that they'd be located in the "blast zone," or the "incineration zone."

Beaverdam resident Lynda Schwartz said her family has been farming in Hanover for more than 300 years, and that she and her husband bought a farm there two years ago to continue that tradition. The pipeline, however, "will bisect our farm, from one corner to the other, diagonally crossing our entire farm," she said, and in the process, disrupt natural springs and creeks and in general, the bucolic nature of her property.

"We're way beyond concerned - I have been shaking for two weeks," she said, referring to when she found out the pipeline would cut across their property. "It's moved into the category of terrifying."

Another Beaverdam resident, Alexia Miles, echoed those thoughts, saying the pipeline would cut through the entire length of her property. She said Chickahominy has been "evasive, a bit deceptive and very disorganized."

The pipeline "would take out a gorgeous spring, it would cut down a lot of woods, it would destroy our narrow pasture where we raise sheep, and it would come within 90 feet of our door," she said.

Yet another speaker offered her organization's support to the county and its citizens in fighting the pipeline.

Lauren Landis, a field coordinator for the Maryland-based grassroots organization, Chesapeake Climate Action Network, told the board that her organization has been successful in stopping other proposed pipelines and that they have volunteers, activists

and organizers ready to help provide information to all homeowners affected by the pipeline.

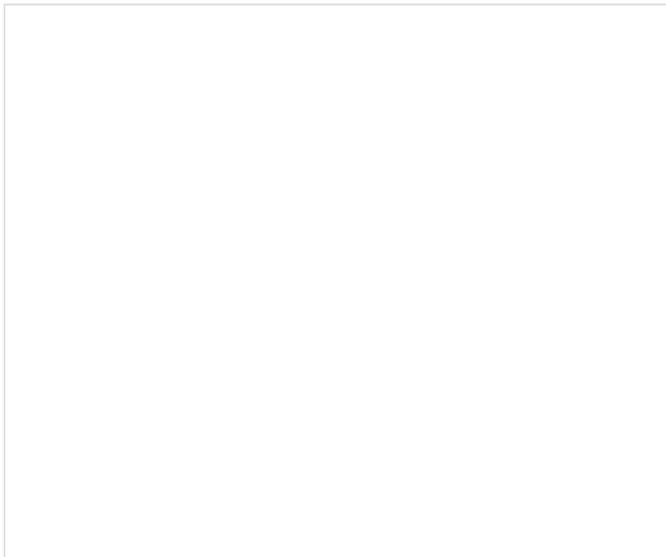
Landis said CCAN was made aware that Chickahominy representatives are going door-to-door talking to property owners and asking them to sign "blank sheets of paper."

"They are shady and liars," Landis said, referring to Chickahominy officials, "and we really need to make sure this pipeline gets stopped."

The county created a website that includes updated information such as interactive maps and contact information for Chickahominy officials. The website is at **<https://www.hanovercounty.gov/1143/Chickahominy-Pipeline>**.

hprestidge@timesdispatch.com

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