



Letter to the Editor: Some concern about pipeline is too little, too late



DIGITAL FIRST MEDIA FILE PHOTO Trees come down as work starts on Sunoco's Mariner East 2 pipeline, which will weave through Chester and Delaware counties.

Delco Times

Posted: 01/14/18, 8:12 PM EST | Updated: 2 weeks, 1 day ago

To the Editor:

I am writing in response to the editorial titled "Economic benefits alone won't resolve pipeline concerns," published Jan. 10. There have been many articles, letters and comments written regarding the Mariner East 2 pipeline over the past several months. I do not wish to re-address many of the concerns that citizens have voiced, although I do believe that persistent, public engagement can and should make elected officials take notice. Such effort by motivated and passionate defenders of our community have succeeded in the current temporary halt to drilling action by Sunoco until its repeated, "egregious and willful" violations of state law and permit conditions can be addressed. ME2 is unique in the material it carries, whose properties are more hazardous than methane ("natural gas") and fuels transported by other pipelines in our area. The hazardous, highly volatile liquids proposed to be transported have characteristics that make them especially dangerous. However, I would like to comment on two points that Editor Phil Heron discusses in his editorial.

The first is with regards to economic impact. It is difficult to take seriously the validity of an economic assessment performed on the behest of Sunoco, the very company that stands to make a significant profit from transporting the compressed gas liquids across the state and subsequently overseas for commercial sale. The fact this study is not from an independent, third-party entity employed by the state or relevant government agency brings to question the potential biased nature of such a report. No assessment of regional economic impact can be completed without investigating and evaluating the influence of this pipeline on certain sectors of the society. The first of these is the impact on property value and home equity for residents in neighborhoods that the pipeline traverses. While job creation is

extremely important to our community, there are all-too-real impacts on residents with respect to the value of their property, who may not benefit from this supposed job growth in and around Marcus Hook. Home equity is one of the major sources of investment that people put their money in, whether for retirement or other uses. A negative impact on property value will have long term consequences on the economic health of the community and must be accounted for in any overall economic assessment of the pipeline. In addition, a major pipeline accident, with subsequent loss of life and property damage, will certainly have immediate and severe effect on the local economy. A single, major safety event may erase all the short-term gains to the economy, and it may take decades for the area to recover, both psychologically and economically, depending upon where the event occurs and the severity of the accident. The possibility of such a catastrophic event must be taken into account, when determining the economic impact of the pipeline. Who is prepared to measure the impact of injury and death to the children of Glenwood Elementary?

Secondly, the editorial singles out state Rep. Chris Quinn, R-168 of Edgmont, in his request of a risk assessment prior to allowing further work on the pipeline. Mr. Quinn is late to chime in: His letter comes only after similar letters by Congressman Meehan, State Senators Dinniman and Rafferty, and Representatives Corbin, Comitta and Milne. I applaud the request for a full risk assessment to be done. However, I am puzzled by the lateness of these requests, especially since they are now “coincidentally” occurring in an election year. These requests also seem to be in response to the significant environmental issues that have resulted due to the placement of the pipeline, but the hazardous nature of the materials to be transported have not changed since the initial concept of this project. The state and the county should have performed risk assessments (environmental risk by the DEP, public safety risk by the Public Utility Commission), but these assessments should have been done years ago, prior to the first segment of pipe ever being laid, especially in high population density areas, such as Delaware County. Where was the outcry by these elected representatives for risk assessment prior to project initiation, at a time when an assessment could have been instrumental in preventing the project in the first place or, at minimum, have been used to plan the route of the pipeline to minimize risk to the community? Mr. Quinn’s website now states, “This pipeline will run directly through densely populated neighborhoods and right past schools, leaving our children vulnerable. Everyone should understand the risks. I am asking that this assessment be conducted and shared with the public before the project is permitted to resume.” Where was this concern when Mr. Quinn was a councilman for Middletown Township, when he voted to approve easements for the pipeline and a risk assessment would have been more meaningful? Where was the outcry with regards to public safety and environmental impact when this project was greenlighted, either at the state level, by Tom Killion, who was the 168th Representative at the time, or by Mr. Quinn as Middletown councilman?

Beyond writing a letter asking for a risk assessment to be done, what does Mr. Quinn plan to do with the information when and if it is generated? What does Mr. Quinn set as his standard for unacceptable risk, and what will he do if an independent study shows the project exceeds this risk? What I call for are: a statement (prior to the risk assessment being conducted) as to what the criteria are for acceptable risk. Such a statement must include input from impacted communities; a halt on pipeline work until this risk is assessed; and a halt to this project indefinitely if the acceptable risk is exceeded. At that time, additional methods to mitigate risk must be implemented and assessed prior to the project continuing. Again, this should have been done prior to the first pipe being laid in Delaware County, but if we are calling for a risk assessment, then clearly defined acceptable risks need to be identified first and commitments to community safety be made prior to re-starting the project. The editorial ponders, “At this point, a full risk assessment might not be a bad idea.” I fully agree, a risk assessment might not be a

bad idea, but would have been a great idea two years ago. Let's make sure a risk assessment is not the end, but the beginning of responsible management of public safety.