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Pipeline Pipe Dreams: Natural Gas Pipelines Face Strong Opposition While Attempting to Gain Easements (/full-blog/wood)

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The modern world requires an ever-increasing amount of energy in order to heat homes, cook food, generate electricity, and provide for the desires of the consuming public. As a result, natural gas is very important to the continued functioning of daily society. Despite its importance, many natural gas companies face opposition from environmental activists and concerned citizens who fear the repercussions of having a pipeline full of combustible material traveling through their land and near their homes. As a result, many gas companies engage in years-long battles with residents in order to gain easements and right-of-ways over their lands in order to get enough conjoined property through which to construct a lengthy pipeline. Recently, the residents of Kentucky faced the decision of whether to grant or deny companies pipeline easements over their property.
Although Williams Co. & Boardwalk Pipeline Partners, the company in charge of Kentucky’s proposed “Bluegrass Pipeline,” estimated that nearly 7,000 jobs would result from the pipeline’s construction, many Kentucky residents openly opposed the pipeline. Many of the objections focused on concerns regarding residential safety and drinking water quality. The company subsequently found many residents unwilling to grant easements through their property. Despite offers ranging as high as $250,000 to $658,000, citizens of the Commonwealth refused to grant any property rights to the builders of a pipeline carrying a resource that endangered life, livelihood, and health. Kentuckians even went so far as to rescind previous agreements granting easements for surveys. Furthermore, eleven Kentucky counties passed resolutions against the pipeline’s construction. Finally, in May of 2014, the pipeline project was suspended indefinitely.

Pipeline easements face opposition not only in Kentucky but also throughout the country. Many Americans are concerned with easements corresponding to a pipeline’s proximity to their homes, and are reluctant to accept the risks involved. Tensions run high between pipeline companies and local residents, with some residents moving to physical threats to keep surveyors off of their property. Many people are motivated to act by safety concerns. While natural gas pipelines are labeled by their communities as safe, the reality is that pipelines, like any other combustible resource transport system, pose serious risks to those who live and work near them. Local residents are often concerned that the pipelines may leak and contaminate the local water supply. Additionally, despite the assurances of the pipeline manufacturers, natural gas leaks and explosions can and do occur.

In light of this information, it is understandable that residents are wary of granting easements for pipelines. No person appreciates dangers to their health or falling property values, and control over the property right of granting easements is one of the few ways that residents can prevent themselves from intrusive companies and pipelines. While Kentucky’s most recent battle over pipeline easements concluded with a residential victory as surveyors were kept off of the property, the pipeline will continue to try to gain access through the state through easements and by employing the policy of eminent domain. The only way to truly protect their property, it seems, is to appeal to the General Assembly to change property laws. Until those laws are changed the fight between residents and pipelines over the granting of easements will continue.

[i] NaturalGas.org (Sept. 20, 2013), http://naturalgas.org/overview/hashtag/.

[iv] Id.


[v] Id.

