North Brooklyn Community Calls National Grid’s Decision to Restart Construction of Controversial Fracked Gas Pipeline “Reckless” During Pandemic and Demand Immediate Halt of Construction

Brooklyn, New York - Wednesday morning, members of the North Brooklyn community, supported by local and citywide elected officials, held a virtual press conference to condemn corporate utility National Grid’s decision to restart construction of the Metropolitan Reliability Infrastructure (MRI) pipeline after Governor Cuomo extended the Stay At Home executive order until June.

National Grid erected their own signs at the site to say they authorized their own construction, and another sign claiming it was essential infrastructure, yet it is up to state regulators to authorize the monopoly utility. The Public Service Commission has not yet approved the work National Grid is doing and the Department of Public Service has recently questioned the need for phase 5 of the MRI pipeline.
At the press conference members of the NoNBKPipeline Coalition announced they were sending a letter to National Grid President John Bruckner signed by 479 elected officials, organizations and ratepayers saying:

“We demand you keep our community safe, and not only allow workers to be paid to stay at home during this pandemic, but work to shut down this fracked gas pipeline for good and help to transition our workforce to a renewable, equitable, and efficient future. Anything less than a complete halt to construction is reckless toward ratepayers, workers and residents.”

National Grid’s fracked gas transmission pipeline was already heavily protested before New York City became the epicenter of the global pandemic. Local residents have submitted thousands of comments against the pipeline with top concerns being climate and community impacts.

The fact that National Grid has restarted construction of a fossil fuel project while Brooklyners are being ravaged by respiratory illness is more evidence they plan to continue to ignore the environmental injustice history of communities along the pipeline route.

“Just like gentrification, these kinds of pipelines are going through working-class Black and brown communities. They’re both trying to push these historically-marginalized communities--Black and brown and indigenous communities-- off the land and out of our homes. And to stop it, we need to kill capitalism, we need to kill all these pipelines,” said Pati of Frack Outta BK and Mi Casa No Es Su Casa.

During the press conference many of the speakers emphasized that the North Brooklyn community has never consented to the pipeline being built.

"Not only has the community never been consulted, our concerns have routinely been blatantly ignored. It is not surprising National Grid is taking advantage of this crisis to restart construction,” said Leslie Velasquez of El Puente. “The route of the pipeline is a densely populated, trafficked area where thousands of people live, work and visit. There are daycares, schools, senior centers, medical centers, public housing and businesses. We have already seen construction affect the lives of our residents.”

Velasquez said El Puente is a community partner with the Moore Street Market. The head of the merchants association there told her he lost 50% of his business revenues in the three months National Grid was doing construction in front of the Market.

The pipeline’s steep price tag has also been a major point of contention. National Grid is requesting to raise monthly bills in order to pay $185 million to finish the pipeline and tens of millions more to expand their Greenpoint LNG facility.
“We do need to heat our homes, our water, and our food, but we don’t need methane gas or any other fossil fuel to do it, said Jessica Azulay Executive Director of Alliance for a Green Economy. “We have healthier options like heat pumps and induction cooktops. Yet, National Grid continues to sell us dirty fossil fuels, even in cases when non-gas options are obviously cheaper. Why? Because this company is way more hooked on gas than we are. We can survive without gas, but National Grid’s pipeline business cannot.”

Local and citywide elected officials have stood with the community in opposing National Grid’s proposal to raise rates for the pipeline and other fracked gas infrastructure. They fiercely criticized National Grid’s decision to restart construction this week.

"It is outrageous that in the midst of this ongoing pandemic, National Grid is resuming work on the North Brooklyn Pipeline which will only exacerbate the coming climate crisis," said New York City Comptroller Scott Stringer. "This project is entirely incompatible with any sustainable future for our city. I stand with New Yorkers across this community who reject building out a massive fracked gas pipeline running beneath their feet. Together, we will fight for the urgent actions our climate crisis demands."

"It is absolutely shameful that amidst a public health crisis and this pending economic health crisis we are all facing that National Grid is seeking to resume construction on this fracked gas pipeline in Bushwick and in our neighborhoods,' said State Senator Julia Salazar. "National Grid fully intends to pass the financial cost of this destructive pipeline on to the shoulders of all of us on our utility bills which too many of our neighbors are already struggling to pay. This pipeline is deadly."

"While the COVID19 pandemic rages on, residents of North Brooklyn should not have to worry about a fossil fuel pipeline being built in their backyard. Restarting construction on the Metropolitan Reliability Infrastructure (MRI) pipeline in the middle of a pandemic is careless and counter to the health and safety of North Brooklyn residents. The pandemic highlights the necessity of keeping North Brooklyn healthy and safe. More than that, we need to be focusing on renewable energy. I stand with the North Brooklyn community against this pipeline," said Assembly Member Joseph R. Lentol (D-North Brooklyn)

"We have been critical of this plan from the beginning and from day one have said fracked gas in Brooklyn is unacceptable and we can't stand for it,” said Elizabeth Adams, Legislative Director for Council Member Stephen Levin. "It is the community that is going to stop this. From day one the community has said no to this pipeline. Our communities deserve so much better than this and we're not going to stand for it."

Community members vowed to continue the fight until the pipeline and all fracked gas expansion in North Brooklyn is stopped for good. Frack Outta BK will be hosting a virtual town hall on the pipeline this Sunday.
NOTES TO THE EDITOR:

MEDIA AVAILABILITY: Members of the No NBK Pipeline Coalition are available for interview upon request.

For more, explore this media pack and visit https://www.nonbkpipeline.org/