



The City of New York

Queens Community Board 11

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Jerry Iannece Chairperson / **Susan Seinfeld** District Manager

To: Board Members
From: Henry Euler and Paul DiBenedetto, Co-Chairs
Date: May 31, 2012
Re: Environmental Committee Meeting
Bird Hazard Reduction Program at JFK Airport
Proposed Spectra Pipeline

On May 30, 2012, the Environmental Committee met to discuss two issues, the bird hazard reduction program at the airports and the installation of the Spectra Gas Pipeline to NYC. Present at the meeting were Henry Euler and Paul DiBenedetto, Committee Chairs, Christina Scherer, Janet McEneaney, Anthony Koutsouradis, Jyothi Sriram, Douglas Montgomery and Incha Kim. Also present were members of the Aviation Committee, Joan Garippa, Andy Rothman, and George Karahalidis; Board 1st Vice Chair Christine Haider and District Manager, Susan Seinfeld. Brian Simon, Director of Government and Community Relations from the Port Authority of NY & NJ (PA) attended to discuss the bird hazard at the airports and Mav Moorhead from NY H2O attended to discuss the natural gas pipeline.

The first part of the meeting focused on the bird hazard reduction program at JFK Airport. In 2011, 257 bird strikes were reported at JFK, while in 2005, only 127 were reported. An article from the New York Daily News was submitted to all committee members present. The article gave some background information regarding the bird strike issue and efforts to mitigate it.

Brian Simon, from the PA, explained how the PA works with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to mitigate the problem with birds being sucked into planes' engines, which causes danger to passengers and aircraft. Currently, a full time biologist is employed to assist with this problem. Mitigation efforts include moving nests, relocating bird colonies and using different types of sound to scare birds from the path of incoming and outgoing flights. The use of euthanizing birds would be a last step, if other efforts fail. The laughing gull is one of the most problematic birds around the airport, however, since the airport is adjacent to the Gateway National Recreation Area at Jamaica Bay, other species of birds cause problems as well.

The USDA is putting forth a proposal whereby Wildlife Services staffers at JFK could go into the recreation area and would be allowed to kill a half dozen types of birds including Canada geese, mute swans, double crested cormorants, red-winged blackbirds, European starlings, crows and rock pigeons in order to mitigate the chance of bird strikes by aircraft. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand has proposed legislation that would bypass the environmental impact review process for the USDA's proposal and would also allow the killing of all Canada geese within a five mile radius of the airport during the molting season this summer. That would extend into residential areas of Queens, Brooklyn and Nassau Counties, according to maps.

Four questions were posed to Mr. Simon regarding who would make the decision to kill the other types of birds under the USDA proposal, when it would be necessary to reach that stage, how the euthanizing would be done, and if there is any public input to the proposal before it is enacted. He replied that the on staff biologist would make the decision, that appropriate federal officials would work with the biologist in deciding how the euthanizing would be done and that the public has until June 13, 2012, to submit comments regarding the USDA proposal.

This proposal to euthanize birds has drawn criticism from environmental, conservation and animal rights groups. They feel that if the birds are killed, other species will settle in and around the airport and still pose danger to flights. They also feel that the wetlands around the airport were preserved to encourage bird populations to develop, especially endangered species. Killing birds is contrary to those goals. These groups recognize the need to protect airline passengers; however, they feel that there are other methods that could be employed to avoid bird strikes that do not necessitate the killing of birds en masse.

The Environmental Committee, which included guests from the Aviation Committee, continued to discuss the issue and questioned Mr. Simon. One member felt that the safety of passengers was of utmost importance and any method to ensure safety should be employed. Another member questioned why a garbage facility was being allowed at LaGuardia Airport, which would attract birds and increase the bird strike problem at that location. Another comment made was that there are more bird strikes now than in the past because there are more flights in and out of JFK now than in the past. The implication was perhaps that there was not as serious a problem as suggested and that a drastic measure such as killing large numbers of birds was unnecessary. Many members of the committee felt that there should be other methods of controlling the bird problem at JFK besides euthanizing birds. It was mentioned that falcons and other birds of prey are used to scare off birds at other airports. Some members thought that the falcons could also pose a danger to aircraft; however, their use seems to be successful at other airports without causing a hazard. The literature available suggests that there are other means to control the problem of bird strikes without having to kill birds.

A suggestion was made by Janet McEneaney that a small sub-group of the Environmental Committee meet and follow up on the issue of bird reduction at JFK and continue our dialogue with Mr. Simon. The group present agreed with this suggestion, as did Mr. Simon. Anyone interested in joining this sub-group, please see Henry or Paul.

During the second part of the meeting, the issue of the Spectra natural gas pipeline was discussed. This is the expansion of existing pipelines that would bring a 30-inch diameter high pressure, high volume line to the New Jersey, New York region. The pipeline would go through parts of Staten Island and New Jersey, including Bayonne and Jersey City, cross the Hudson River (7 feet below the river bed) and go into Greenwich Village in Manhattan. The proposed line has caused much controversy; however, it was recently approved by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). Many groups opposed to the pipeline plan to sue to overturn FERC's decision.

At the meeting, two articles were handed out regarding the issue. One was a statement from Spectra Energy Corporation describing the pipeline and its economic and environmental benefits. The other was a list of reasons why the pipeline is unnecessary and dangerous. The list was developed by saneenergyproject.org. Mav Moorhead, of the NYH2O group, spoke at the meeting against the pipeline.

She spoke about the safety problems with the pipeline and that if there was a breach in the line, it would cause an explosion and resulting fire which may result in many deaths and injuries and much property damage. Other pipelines in other areas have experienced breaches and resulting explosions. Because the pipeline will go through highly populated areas, there is great concern for public safety. It was also mentioned that the builder of the pipeline has a history of safety problem issues. It was noted that federal pipeline regulation and oversight is inadequate.

Ms. Moorhead also mentioned that most of the gas coming through this pipeline will be exported and not directly benefit the local consumer. The gas that does reach the local consumer will have very high levels of radioactive radon gas in it, because it will be produced through fracking and travel relatively short distances from Marcellus Shale areas to the consumer. Radon gas is the leading cause of lung cancer in non-smokers. When gas travels long distances, radon gas breaks down. The gas our region has been receiving, comes from long distances and, therefore, the radon gas coming through and out of our stoves and furnaces have been at relatively safe levels. This will change significantly and dangerously according to Ms. Moorhead, if we use gas from the Spectra pipeline. A spokesperson for the Spectra pipeline stated in an article that the risks from radon gas were exaggerated by anti-pipeline groups.

Ms. Moorhead also mentioned that natural gas is not as clean as most think since it does contain methane gas which is very polluting. She also feels that we are headed in the wrong direction in terms of energy production. Renewable sources of energy should be getting more attention and more of the taxpayer funded subsidies that Spectra and other energy companies like Chesapeake count on to build and develop their industry. Also mentioned was that local consumers will probably be seeing a rise in the delivery charge part of their gas bills, because that money will be used to help build the pipeline that supplies the gas Con Edison will be purchasing for consumer use.

Ms. Moorhead left the committee several articles from scientists and other experts and groups who oppose the pipeline. She also mentioned that on the same day that FERC approved the Spectra pipeline, a request was submitted to FERC to approve the Constitution Pipeline that will supply Marcellus-Shale produced fracked gas to the North East United States. She urged our committee to write a resolution opposing the Spectra Pipeline and to make others aware of the pipeline's problems and issues. Community Board 2 in Manhattan passed a resolution opposing the pipeline since it will be coming through that area. Also opposed include Mayor Healy of Jersey City, public officials like Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer and groups such as the Sierra Club, Food and Water Watch and No Gas Pipeline. Supporters of the pipeline include Mayor Bloomberg, New York League of Conservation Voters and many unions who will benefit from the jobs produced through building and maintaining of the pipeline.

Our Environmental Committee decided to draft our own resolution to submit before the full Board. We also asked Ms. Moorhead or another representative to appear before the Board to present their case. We also endeavored to invite a representative from Spectra Energy to present their side of the issue to the full Board so that both sides would be heard on this matter. In the event that Spectra can not send someone, we will ask Claudia Filomena of the Mayor's office to send a representative presenting the Mayor's point of view in favor of the pipeline.