

B.L. England won't switch to gas burner

Future of Upper Twp. plant, South Jersey Gas pipeline now appear to be in question

By **BILL BARLOW**
Special to the Star and Wave

UPPER TOWNSHIP — The owners of the B.L. England power plant have formally dropped plans to repower the coal-fired generating station with natural gas, according to court documents released by the New Jersey Sierra Club, which celebrated the decision.

The environmental organization has been fighting for years to block a natural gas pipeline through the pinelands. The main impetus for the pipeline was to supply natural gas to the refitted power plant in Beesleys Point. In a recent statement, New Jersey Sierra Club Director Jeff Tittel said the decision should prompt Gov. Phil Murphy to stop the South Jersey Gas (SJG) pipeline project entirely.

"Now that this plant isn't going to get built, the Murphy administration should negotiate a settlement to end the SJG pipeline. The closing of B.L. England should be an alarm bell going off [the pipeline] is not needed," Tittel said. "Gov. Murphy should stop this pipeline altogether and negotiate a settlement on this so that we don't have to move forward on going to court."

He also called on the

Pinelands Commission and the state Board of Public Utilities to reverse their approvals of the pipeline.

But South Jersey Gas has not dropped its push for a new pipeline.

The proposed 20-mile natural gas pipeline was presented primarily as supplying the power plant, but not exclusively so. The gas utility has stated the pipeline would improve reliability and service to thousands of customers in Cape May County.

"While we are disappointed by the potential impact this notice may have, we remain committed to the vitally important Cape Atlantic Reliability Project and to meeting the needs of the residents and businesses in southernmost New Jersey," said Dave Robbins, president of South Jersey Gas. "Delaying needed investments to reinforce infrastructure compromises service and safety — and that's not a risk we are willing to take."

He said South Jersey Gas is exploring options but needs a secondary supply route for 142,000 customers in Atlantic and Cape May counties.

"A project like the Cape Atlantic Reliability line won't just be shelved — we'll continue working collaboratively with cus-

tomers, local residents, the leaders of the communities we serve and our regulators to ensure that our region benefits from a balanced approach to addressing the area's energy needs, while also driving energy independence and lowering costs," Robbins said in a prepared statement.

There were no replies by presstime to a request for comment from the B.L. England plant manager or from plant owners Cape May Holdings LLC. The local company is an affiliate of Texas-based Rockland Capital, which also did not respond to a request for comment.

In a Feb. 27 letter to the Superior Court Clerk, attorney Ira Megdal, representing South Jersey Gas, informed the court that the plant's owners have advised the utility that they do not plan to repower the facility with natural gas as previously intended.

"The purpose of this letter is solely to bring these facts to the court's attention," he wrote.

On the same day, a more expansive letter from New Jersey Attorney General Gurbir Grewal requested the court delay upcoming oral arguments in the ongoing pipeline appeal, set for April 9, citing the announcement that the

plant will not repower using natural gas.

"That filing offers new, important information requiring further consideration by the relevant state entities," Grewal wrote.

He indicates that the change undermines the basis for the original approval of the pipeline. Also, he wrote, the Pinelands Commission included a condition that any redirection of the natural gas intended for B.L. England would require a new application.

Both letters were released by the Sierra Club. Neither a representative of the state Attorney General's Office nor Megdal immediately responded to requests to confirm the letters or offer further comment.

The decision is the latest in the long fight over the pipeline, which South Jersey Gas officials have argued is important to ensure reliability for residents of Cape May and Atlantic counties. Environmental groups, including the Sierra Club and others, sought to block the approval at every level. Most recently that has meant appealing 2015 actions from the Pinelands Commission and the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities that cleared the way for the pipeline. That

matter is still pending in the appellate courts.

B.L. England has played a central role in Upper Township for close to 60 years, not only as one of the most visible landmarks in the area but also as a source of funding, electricity and jobs. The township receives energy tax receipts of more than \$6 million a year for hosting the power plant, which funds a significant portion of the township budget. Township officials have indicated they expect to receive that money even if the power plant were to close.

In public comments last fall, Mayor Richard Palombo indicated that he expects the plant to close this spring, stating during an October meeting that the owners were in the process of decommissioning the plant.

Fired by coal and diesel, the 447-megawatt Beesleys Point power plant has spent more than a decade under an order to meet emissions standards or shut down. According to court documents, the state Department of Environmental Protection gave the order to then-owners Atlantic City Electric in 2006. The regional power company sold the plant to Cape May Holdings the next year, reportedly for

more than \$7 million.

The order was amended in 2012, giving the company until 2016 to comply.

But the company that operates the power grid the plant feeds into requested it remain open for the sake of reliability while upgrades were made to the transmission system. Those upgrades are expected to be completed this spring, clearing another obstacle for the plant to go dark.

At another meeting, Palombo said he met with representatives of a wind-generated power company in October on the future of the plant, envisioning its use as a transmission center for an offshore wind farm.

According to Tittel, the Sierra Club has worked for 20 years to shut the plant down, arguing that it emits thousands of tons of sulphur dioxide and other emissions each year.

South Jersey Gas officials had suggested that switching from coal to natural gas would mean cleaner energy and a significant improvement to air quality, although the Sierra Club responds that much of the natural gas would be acquired through a controversial extraction system known as fracking, alleging that would further harm the environment.

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Builders Club raises funds with puzzle tournament

LOWER TOWNSHIP — The Richard M. Teitelman Middle School Builders Club recently held a successful fundraiser for its community projects.

Nineteen four-member teams competed for prizes in the midwinter tournament to raise funds for the club projects. The club's mission and vision is to continue upkeep and support of the Union Bethel Civil War Veterans Cemetery and provide Thanksgiving baskets for families in need at their school again the year. Plans include support for the Friday Book Bag food program and an animal shelter.

The puzzle tournament was a welcome late-winter indoor activity for teams to support the Builders Club event. Kiwanis Club of Cape May sponsored the purchase of the 550-piece jigsaw puzzles that depicted Lighthouses of New Jersey.

"The puzzle worked out to be just right for a competition," said Jacqueline Moon,



Provided

The winning team in the puzzle tournament was Andrew Heim, Ryan Devine, Nick Arpa and Lower Cape May Regional Key Club teacher/adviser Chris Vitale.

a Kiwanian adviser to the club.

The winning team was the LCMR Kiwanis Key Club, which sponsored itself for \$50 and walked away with almost \$300 in prizes. The team members were Club Teacher/Adviser Chris Vitale, Nick Arpa, Ryan Devine and Andrew Heim. Second place was Puzzlers Too sponsored

by the Crab House at 2 Mile Landing with Builders Club President Jakob Hansen, his grandmother Gail Johns and Hailee Stiefel. Aqua Trails Kayaking sponsored third-place team Paddle Puzzlers. Team members were Erin Haibach, a Builders Club member, Kyla Haibach, Anya Davids and Marley Krone-meyer.

Local businesses and individuals provided prizes and funding support. Volunteers who helped during the event included Kiwanis Club members, Lower Township Historic Preservation Commission members, Teitelman employees, "Cafeteria Lady" Joan and office administrator Lauren Hansen, Builders Club teacher/adviser Paul Schulte, and Kiwanis Club of Cape May advisers Jacqueline Moon and Mary Hendrie.

Kiwanis Builders Club is an international student-led program providing members with opportunities to perform service, build character and develop leadership. It is open to middle and junior high school students. Clubs charter in partnership with a Kiwanis club and a school or community-based organization serving middle or junior high school students. For more information on the Kiwanis Club of Cape May and Richard M. Teitelman Middle School Builders Club, visit capemaykiwanis.com/project-builders-club.html.

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DATE	HIGH		LOW	
	A.M.	P.M.	A.M.	P.M.
13	12:52	1:19	7:16	7:15
14	1:51	2:26	8:23	8:19
15	3:01	3:43	9:34	9:30
16	4:15	4:56	10:42	10:40
17	5:23	6:01	11:43	11:45
18	6:24	6:58		12:38
19	7:20	7:50	12:44	1:29
20	8:11	8:40	1:40	2:18

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