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GAS PIPELINE REJECTED

State regulators cite water quality concerns in plan

BY MARK HARRINGTON
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New York State regulators Wednesday night cited potential “water quality violations” in rejecting an application for a contested natural gas pipeline to the region, but left room for future approval.

In a closely watched decision at 8:30 p.m., the state Department of Environmental Conservation denied the application by Williams Transco for the Northeast Supply Enhancement project, a nearly \$1 billion pipeline contracted by National Grid to increase gas supply to the region by 14 percent.

“As currently conceived in the application, construction of the NESE pipeline project is



projected to result in water quality violations and fails to meet New York State’s rigorous water quality standards,” the DEC said in a news release.

The DEC said construction of the project “would result in significant water-quality impacts from the re-suspension of sediments and other contaminants, including mercury and copper.” DEC said it would also “cause impacts to habitats due to the disturbance of shellfish beds and other benthic resources.”

Opponents who have seized on its potential environmental impacts were quick to declare victory, though the agency’s decision “without prejudice” meant the fight wasn’t over.

Lee Ziesche, an organizer for the Sane Energy Project who joined in a hunger strike this week to stop the project, said the decision “shows that New Yorkers are winning the fight against the Williams Pipeline.”

But she noted the DEC has left similar room to approve projects before, and said, “We’re going to stay vigilant and keep fighting until this pipeline is stopped.”

New York City Comptroller Scott Stringer called the decision “a major victory in our efforts to deliver the greener and more sustainable future our children and our children’s children deserve.”

But Williams spokesman Chris Stockton called the DEC’s denial a “minor technical issue with our application,”

and said the company’s team on the project “will be evaluating the issue and resubmitting” the application soon.

“We are confident that we can be responsive to this technical concern, meet our customer’s in-service date and avoid a moratorium that would have a devastating impact on the regional economy and environment,” Stockton said.

National Grid said it was “cautiously optimistic” the project would move forward, but added, “Until we have greater certainty” of DEC approval “we will continue to advise all new commercial and residential applicants that our ability to provide firm gas service is contingent on the timely construction” of the pipeline.

Kyle Strober, executive director of the Association for a Better Long Island, a developer group, said, “Every day that goes by without an approval hinders small and mid-size businesses.”

In a letter to Williams, the DEC left open the prospect that the company could address issues with its application.

“Should [Williams] ultimately provide sufficient documentation to give the department reasonable assurances that construction and operation of the project would meet all applicable water quality standards, the department would first need to conclude that mitigation of these impacts is possible, and if so, that such mitigation is sufficient.”

The project promised to bring an additional 400 million cubic feet of gas per day to Long Island and the metropolitan region, addressing what National Grid said is a critical shortage of supply.

The 24-mile gas project would encompass about 18 miles of pipeline under New York Bay and connect with existing infrastructure at sea beyond the Rockaways.

With Robert Brodsky

Copter crashes into Hudson River, 2 hurt

BY LAUREN COOK
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A helicopter crashed into the Hudson River Wednesday afternoon, leaving the pilot and a dock worker on the ground with minor injuries, officials said.

The incident happened around 2:25 p.m. near 30th Street and 12th Avenue, police and fire officials said. The pilot, a 34-year-old man, was the only person on board.

“He was able to get out of the helicopter and get on the pad [of the helicopter] and a boat came by,” and picked him up, NYPD Assistant Chief of Manhattan South Stephen Hughes said at a news conference.

The helicopter, owned by ZIP Aviation, had just been refueled on a helipad at 30th Street and 12th Avenue when the pilot went to reposition it onto another helipad on the north side of the pier and fell short of the landing pad, Hughes said. Emergency responders tied the heli-

copter to the pier until they were able to lift it from the water around 4 p.m.

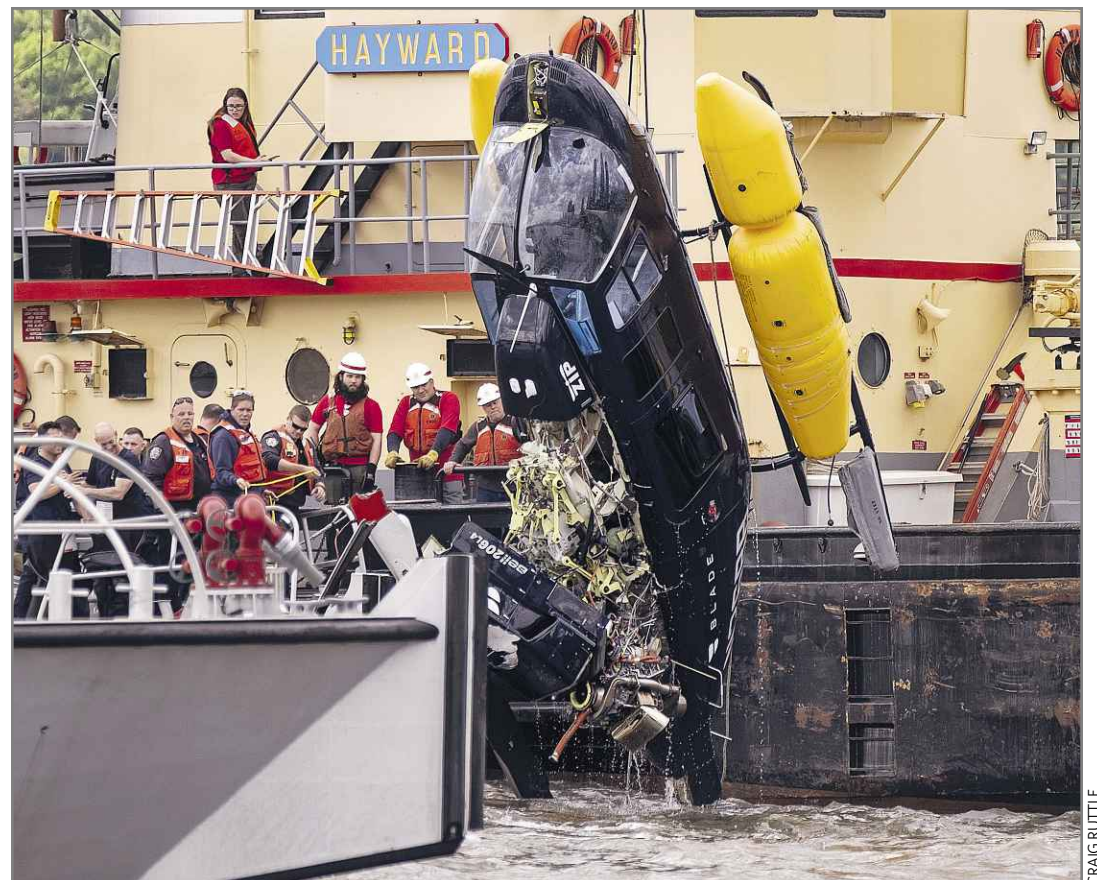
The pilot suffered an injury to his left hand and the dock worker hurt his right wrist when he slipped while trying to get away from the helicopter, according to Hughes.

Ashton Byrd, 28, said he was passing by right as the helicopter took off from the helipad. It went several yards before plunging tail-first into the water, he said.

“Everything looked normal. All of a sudden it goes sideways and spinning,” he said. “It leveled off but it went down tail-side into the water.”

Byrd said the helicopter floated for a bit and he saw the door open but then nearby boats arrived to help the pilot.

The pier at 30th Street and 12th Avenue has a non-airport heliport owned by Air Pegasus, according to the company’s website.



A helicopter that crashed into the Hudson River at 30th Street is lifted from the water Wednesday.