

# Wisconsin Safe Energy Alliance: In response to Minnesota decision, Jefferson County residents call for eminent domain protections

Posted on Thursday, Jun 28, 2018

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FORT ATKINSON- Today, the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (PUC) voted to approve the Certificate of Need for Enbridge's proposed Line 3 tar sands pipeline, greenlighting more oil to flow into Superior, driving the need for another tar sands pipeline through Wisconsin. This will likely mean that Enbridge will start seeking permits in Wisconsin and getting easements and permission from the landowners and tribes for the new pipeline.

The Line 66 Pipeline threatens landowners in Jefferson County, who currently live with four pipelines and could now see a fifth pipeline. In order for Enbridge to add a pipeline, they would need to acquire additional land through easements or by taking land through eminent domain. For some, this land taking could also result in their homes being taken and destroyed for the pipeline. With this new, looming threat, Jefferson County landowners are calling on the State Legislature to protect them from the threat of eminent domain for private gain.

"For those of us who already have the pipelines running through our property, the only right we have—our right to our property—could be taken away," said Jae Ames, a landowner from Fort Atkinson. "I can't think of another business that has the right to get away with what this company is doing. Let alone that this is a foreign entity that has the right to do this on US soil."

The concerns of eminent domain for private gain go beyond the threat of land taken, as Denise Poeppel, landowner in Fort Atkinson, explained: “If Enbridge has the power of eminent domain, we lose twice. First, we have no legal way to protect our property against encroachment; and second, we have no voice at the bargaining table, leaving us unable to negotiate a fair settlement for our farm land. If Enbridge can end negotiations and proceed to condemnation, we have no leverage.”

While calling for legislature to take up this issue, landowners are also hoping that the Jefferson County Board will protect their rights now by passing a resolution in support of eminent domain reform. “We collected over 100 signatures in a short time because residents of Jefferson County recognize the need for reform,” said Linda Ottenbacher, resident of Fort Atkinson whose property is in the path of the new pipeline. “In the meantime, we need to make sure we are all protected from the immediate threat of eminent domain abuse,” concluded Ottenbacher.

The Jefferson County Board will take up a resolution that recognizes the abuse of eminent domain for private gain, but does not suggest a legislative fix at the July 10 County Board meeting. The pipeline also endangers the health and vitality of the county, especially since it would cross the Rock River, upstream of Lake Koshkonong.