

Ottawa

Denied Enbridge pipeline rebuild sparks rift among councillors

Coun. Tim Tierney says staff's intervention did 'disservice' to citizens

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Residents of Ottawa rallied to get the city to declare a climate emergency. That led to the 'energy evolution' document that's at the centre of this debate. (Kate Porter/CBC)

A stymied \$123-million plan by Enbridge Gas to replace a section of an aging pipeline through four Ottawa wards has kicked off a debate at city hall over political interference.

The Enbridge Gas pipeline carries natural gas to about 165,000 business and residential customers in the region, but after over half a century in use the utility says it's now nearing its end-of-life.

The utility is preparing a new application to rebuild part of the infrastructure along St. Laurent Boulevard after the Ontario Energy Board (OEB) rejected its plan in May 2022, in part because of an intervention prepared by Ottawa city staff — but also because it felt repairs or retrofits could be enough.

Enbridge found support from Beacon Hill-Cyrville Coun. Tim Tierney, who will try to rally support for the project at Tuesday's environment committee.

"What's happened is based on some of the staff feedback, the Ontario Energy Board and the province rejected the application to fix this extremely ... old pipeline," he told CBC News.

"We all support trying to achieve certain targets for greenhouse gas emissions and [trying to get to net zero by 2050](#), but unfortunately there's some ramifications when we move too quickly."

An initial version of Tierney's motion resolved to wipe away a staff submission suggesting the city is on track to greatly reduce its reliance on natural gas, which sparked concerns from some fellow councillors.



Beacon Hill-Cyrville ward Coun. Tim Tierney is worried that if the pipeline isn't replaced, a big winter outage could be on the way. (Francis Ferland/CBC)

Staff relied on the city's "energy evolution" strategy, a document that lays out plans to eliminate Ottawa's greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 — and names Enbridge Gas as a stakeholder.

It includes plans to shift people away from fossil fuels through building retrofits and encouraging the switch to electric heat pumps.

- [**City's path to 'net zero' emissions by 2050 to cost billions**](#)
- [**Ottawa committee seeks stable city funding for climate projects**](#)

Tierney said he supports the city's intentions, but after speaking with Enbridge he became concerned that stalling the pipeline replacement [could put his residents at risk of a catastrophic power loss](#).

"I'm very supportive of city staff, but in this case here I think we've done a disservice to the citizens of Ottawa," he said. "Anybody on that committee has to park ideology

for 10 seconds and meet with reality.

"It's not rhetoric. It's not hyperbole."

Enbridge spokesperson Leanne McNaughton concurred, saying "this does need to be replaced immediately just due to it being an operation for over 60 years."

The OEB decision suggests otherwise, arguing that there is no imminent risk of failure and suggesting the company should focus on cheaper alternatives.

Trust the numbers, urges King

Tierney put the upcoming debate in stark terms of politics versus energy safety — a dichotomy fellow councillor Rawlson King rejects.

The pipeline also runs through King's Rideau-Rockcliffe ward.

While the safe upkeep of the infrastructure is important to King, he doesn't buy Tierney's argument that building a new pipeline is necessary to protect against catastrophic failure.

"That's rhetoric that's being frankly utilized by many people in the energy lobby," King said. "I think these are false arguments."



Rideau-Rockcliffe ward Coun. Rawlson King said he respects staff findings. (Francis Ferland/CBC)

King said he was not supportive of the initial motion because he wants staff to be able to provide their expert opinion "without the fear of political interference."

"Which is why," he said, "we have these independent regulatory bodies in the first place."

Kent Elson, who worked on an intervention to OEB for Environment Defence, has applauded the decision and the city's work to ensure development aligns with effective policy.

"The pipeline's leave-to-construct being turned down, that was not something that you would have seen five years ago," he said.

"It's environmentally and financially absurd to be investing in fossil fuel pipelines in the midst of a climate crisis and in the midst of a transition away from fossil fuels ... Ontario ratepayers would still be paying this off until the 2080s."

Revised wording focuses on discussion

When Tierney puts forward his motion Tuesday, it will look much different from the one affixed to the agenda.

Instead of calling on council to support the Enbridge Gas proposal, it directs staff "to continue collaborative activities" and find opportunities to reduce emissions which ensures energy security.

McNaughton said Enbridge is already doing just that, pointing to a task force with the city and Hydro Ottawa that's referenced in the new wording.

King likewise feels the motion is "reflective" of what the utility is already doing and he's confident that a future intervention by staff would not take Enbridge by surprise.

The new version may appear watered down, but Tierney said he's more concerned with getting his concerns out there.

"I don't care what makes people feel better about themselves, I honestly don't," he said. "I care about my residents that need natural gas when we have a blackout."

As for the pipeline itself, Enbridge will submit a new application to the OEB in early 2024.

McNaughton said it will include new details on the integrity of the current pipeline, but "the plans are the same."
