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LNG plant ‘dead in the water,’ according to mayor

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The LNG project is “dead in the water,” Chester Mayor Stefan Roots said Saturday.

Penn America Energy wanted to build a 100-acre liquefied natural gas facility along the Chester waterfront, a move met with vocal community opposition.

On Friday, President Joe Biden paused all pending approvals of LNG exports because of climate change.

“My Administration is announcing today a temporary pause on pending decisions of Liquefied Natural Gas exports — with the exception of unanticipated and immediate national security emergencies,” Biden said. “During this period, we will take a hard look at the impacts of LNG exports on energy costs, America’s energy security, and our environment. This pause on new LNG approvals sees the climate crisis for what it is: the existential threat of our time.”

This pause applied to LNG projects already in the midst of the permitting process. The proposed Penn America Energy project had not yet gotten to that stage.

“It’s pretty simple: It’s dead,” Roots said. “If you can’t get a permit, you can’t move forward. The project in Chester hasn’t even begun the permitting process. Other projects that are in the process are stopped ... This really makes this dead in the water.”

Roots announced the situation on his Chester Matters blog.

“We’re thrilled about it,” he said. “We can breathe a lot easier literally and figuratively. Here’s our opportunity to build up the waterfront as it should be.”

The mayor said the waterfront can now be developed to align with making Chester’s waterfront a premier destination.

“It’s seven city blocks that won’t be plowed down to make a blast zone,” Roots said. “People won’t be afraid to come to Chester now for fear of getting blown up.”

In 2022, the Pennsylvania General Assembly created the Philadelphia LNG Export Task Force to examine the economic feasibility and security needs in developing an LNG export facility in the Port of Philadelphia.

Penn America Energy wants to build an LNG facility for a cost of \$4 billion to \$8 billion that can process up to 1 billion cubic feet of natural gas daily along the Delaware River. City, state and other officials have said the company has identified a 100-acre location in Chester for the facility. Penn America wanted to send cargoes to South America, Europe and Asia by the first quarter of 2028.

In August, the task force held a hearing on the Widener University campus and faced a packed room of opponents, including Roots, Chester Residents Concerned for Quality Living and the Clean Air Council.

Delaware County Council issued a statement expressing its discontent at not being able to testify about members’ opposition to the project.

Opponents voiced concerns about how an operating LNG terminal would impact city residents’ health.

“What we don’t want is to have to breathe a new batch of particulate matter: NOx, sulfur dioxide, carbon monoxide, sulfuric acids and naturally occurring radioactive materials from the LNG plant because our residents are sick,” Roots said at the time.

Zulene Mayfield, chairperson of Chester Residents, offered another sentiment.

“There are people who don’t give a rat’s behind about us,” Mayfield said after the hearing. “They don’t give a damn who they hurt, kill, maim, hinder as long as they can make a dollar.”

Carl Marrara, executive director of the Pennsylvania Manufacturers’ Association, testified that the facility would take four years to construct, creating an annual average of 4,323 construction jobs and that full-time operations would support 200 to 400 full-time jobs.

Marrara said the project would generate \$527 million in taxes over the four years of construction and then \$184 million annually each year when operating.

In November, the task force adopted its final report, supporting the creation of a LNG terminal in southeastern Pennsylvania.

In releasing it, state Rep. Martina White, R-170, of Philadelphia, said, “We have the opportunity to not only increase energy production safely and efficiently, (but) work toward reduced energy costs for Pennsylvania consumers.”

On Friday, Biden, in placing the pause on pending approvals of LNG exports, voiced a concern about the connection between LNG and climate change.