

## A team effort

Local task force gets input on proposed plant

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CORRESPONDENT

Public officials are banding together to take a formal stand on a proposed 350-megawatt combined cycle power plant project in Brockton. The Regional Task Force on the Proposed Brockton Power Plant held an information-gathering session last week at the Howard School in West Bridgewater.

The \$350 million dollar plan is proposed for a 13.2-acre parcel at the Oak Hill Industrial Park in Brockton, nearby two, over-55 mobile home parks in West Bridgewater. Town officials and residents in the surrounding towns have concerns about the environmental impact the power plant will have on the region.

While the task force has not issued a public position on the power plant, town officials representing seven area towns — West Bridgewater, Lakeville, Whitman, Middleboro, Halifax, Brockton, and Abington — turned out for the meeting. Town officials from East Bridgewater were invited,

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but did not attend, although several East Bridgewater residents aired concerns at the meeting.

State Rep. Christine Canavan, D-Brockton, and Brockton City Council member Thomas Brophy were also on hand for the task force meeting.

"The purpose of this meeting is to gather information and to look at the proposed impact the plant would have," said West Bridgewater Selectman and task force chairman Matthew Albanese.

"That doesn't mean there isn't room for local input," he said.

"The towns want to have their concerns expressed."

"I think us working together lets

them know they're not welcome," Canavan said.

West Bridgewater and Brockton have been discussing the project for more than a year, Albanese said.

Canavan said she had applied for and was granted "limited intervener status" in relation to the project. She also focused on Brophy's efforts at the state level asking for the plant's proponents to provide more information.

"The paperwork is waiting for the site board... my expectation is that we'll hear something by December," she said.

Area town officials at the meeting raised resident concerns about the project. Whitman Selectman Daniel Salvucci said the Whitman

board of health has heard from residents and has gone on record as being opposed to the plant.

"We (board of selectmen) haven't formed an opinion one way or another, but it will be on our next agenda to assign someone to the task force," Salvucci said.

The same is true in Halifax, where the health board sent a letter to approximately 20 other "downwind towns" in the area encouraging them to approach their local health boards to get their concerns on record.

"Our board of health has concerns about air emissions," Halifax board of health chairman John Delano said. "We basically took the final environmental impact report, which has a statement about air emissions coming from the power plant, and we found they do have a health impact... with respiratory illnesses, kidney diseases and heart diseases," he said. "Even with slight changes in the amount of emissions, there is still a health risk... so we want answers to these questions."

"We prepared a map with a 20-mile radius," Delano said. "It's quite an eye-opener, when you see the location to your town hall, your schools, your ball fields. I thought at first the power plant didn't effect me until I plotted the stack and saw by how the crow flies, which is what the wind does, and thought 'Wow! We're close.'"

Delano said Halifax has a larger senior citizen population and health questions must be addressed.

Brockton resident David Pimentel, expressed concerns about the plant's capacity to produce more than 100 tons of air pollution.

"The federal government defines any plant that can produce this amount as a 'major source of pollution' under federal guidelines," he said. "They've now changed the name to Brockton Clean Energy and should put quotes around it because I don't know how any major source of pollution can be denoted 'clean energy.'"

Concerns were also raised about nitric oxide, and the fact that the plant owners had to buy offsets which are permits to produce nitric oxide into the air, because Brockton already exceeded the limits for expelling the chemical.

Like air, possible water pollution is also a concern for local officials.

"One of things West Bridgewater wanted was a study on the impact on the water if there was any amount," Albanese said.

"I can't believe that our federal and state government has allowed this," said Barbara Carchidi, a West Bridgewater resident.

Jenny Jedson of Brockton said she visited a similar plant in Rhode Island and described the property as "totally barren with no animals or birds or houses." In contrast, the Brockton site sits in close proximity to neighborhoods, schools, and businesses.

"It would really open your eyes," Jedson said, encouraging attendees to make the trip to Rhode Island.

Mariann Lorrain, of West Bridgewater, said the trip was worth it.

"The water from the cooling towers they say is water vapor. They do not tell you all the chemicals required to get the water to come out as vapor, and they won't even tell you what comes out of the stack."

"I'm hoping maybe through the task force some of my questions might be answered," said Brockton resident John Bosco. Bosco said the water used to cool the plant would be chemically treated with chlorine, which could have an adverse effect on the area.

"In Brockton, we have a swimming pool and the chlorine actually corroded the cement and it caved in. I'm concerned about the discharge of 1.5 million gallons of water and how much chlorine is discharged. I never got any answers to these questions."

West Bridgewater resident Jim Lorrain said he's never received an answer from the plant regarding how much chlorine will be kept on-site, and Laurie Mathews of East Bridgewater noted the lack of air monitoring stations to ensure safe air quality in the downwind communities.

"There are monitoring stations in Milton and Boston but not in the line of winds with this plant," Mathews said. Mathews also said there are a number of studies available on the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Web site as well as the American Lung Association, regarding chemical effects on health.

"Even for people active outdoors, who like to walk or run or play sports. When your respiratory rate is up you're taking in far more concentrations of those chemicals," she said.

Middleboro Health Officer Jeanne Spalding advised people to do research, and emphasized the need for routine testing of the ground water even on the site of the Rhode Island plant—as a baseline for fact gathering.

"Even though that other one has no houses in this area, it might be helpful to cite in our research (for

this one)," she said.

Mathews noted that according to a California study, children living near electric power plants experienced higher rates of asthma, decreased lung capacity, bronchitis, and other health problems. East Bridgewater resident Gary Petti provided a study conducted by the American Academy of Pediatrics regarding ambient air pollution for children.

The lack of an evacuation plan in case of a plant emergency also has local officials concerned.

"When someone puts in a gas station in one of our towns, they have to have monitoring systems in case of leaks," said Delano, "and I went on the EPA air quality site and there are so few air monitoring stations—with over 120 power plants in MA, that doesn't make any sense to me... how do you know they are compliant?"

Delano emphasized that any power plant should be required to put in a number of air monitoring stations and pay for the state to do the analysis, and he urged the task force to help make the practice a requirement.

"Sitting back here I'm getting a little nervous," said Abington Selectman Bob Wayne.

"What's the approach to deal with these questions? I don't see the benefit of this power plant right now; you need a good 20-30 years to see the side effects on children and lung studies. Where do we go from here?"

*The next meeting of the Regional Task Force on the Brockton Power Plant is scheduled for Thursday, Nov. 6 at 7 pm in West Bridgewater's Howard School cafeteria.*