

Town Council hears opposition to LNG tankers in the bay

By Dotti Farrington

Three anti-LNG speakers gave the Town Council Monday an update on the status of liquefied natural gas facility proposals and to stress the importance of Jamestown's joining at least legally and preferable financially in the upcoming battles to keep LNG tankers out of Narragansett Bay.

The councilors indicated solidarity to legally oppose the LNG plans and said they would take formal action at their Aug. 22 meeting to join in the legal battles.

The councilors were non-committal in response to pleas for the tangible and symbolic support of adding local money to the fund to fight LNG tanker terminals in Providence and in Fall River, Mass.

The Keyspan plan for Providence has been rejected by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, but that decision is being appealed.

Speakers Monday expressed doubt that the appeal would be successful.

Most anti-LNG energy is being aimed at the Weaver's Cove proposal for Fall River, where that city has committed \$1 million to the battle in the next year, and has

received pledges toward legal expenses of \$25,000 each from Bristol, Newport, and Portsmouth.

Speaking Monday were Andrew Hodgkin, chief legal counsel for Gov. Donald Carcieri, Attorney General Patrick Lynch, and Eric Poulin, project manager for the city of Fall River. They said they want Jamestown's moral support and partnership for strategy and various battle elements, and they would welcome whatever financial support the council would approve.

Councilwoman Barbara Szeptowski announced that she was prepared to take the unpopular stance of being against spending for the legal battle, not because she was not opposed to the LNG plans but because she believed the state should be handling all the funding. She said she was concerned that she would be viewed with the same disdain that Newport Councilor Colleen McGrath drew when she announced early this month her opposition to anti-LNG spending and her belief that a LNG facility would not be a safety or economic problem.

Lynch led the response to Szeptowski by saying that the Rhode Island executive branch

has been active for a year in the battle, but the state legislative commitment is pending.

The town benefits or is hurt by the decisions made on LNG tankers, the attorney general said. The town legacy is at stake in regard to the future and impacts by LNG facilities, he added.

"The state should pay the most. Separate demands need special talents. We are going up against massive powers. We need resources. Your tax dollars will pay (for security) for every trip a tanker makes. You are standing on the front line. You pay for your citizens. You pay for your legacy," Lynch said.

Council President David Long reacted. "You're good. You're good, but we need more from the state. If the governors (of R.I. and Mass.) stand together, they are more powerful than all the towns together. We need leadership from the top."

Hodgkin promised there would be appropriate support in the state budget.

Poulin said Fall River appreciates Rhode Island's efforts. "Fall River is not wealthy. We believe this fight is important and we hope for state (Mass.) help, but we can't wait for the state help. We need local help, too, for grassroots efforts," he said.

He commended Jamestown emergency services leaders for their sworn affidavits about impacts of LNG tanker use in the bay. He explained the affidavits are an important part of the growing documentation being collected for the legal battles.

Szeptowski said it scared her that the town of Bristol had to become the driving force and the state had not done enough when a LNG mishap could make 9/11 look like nothing. She asked why the state had not jumped in. Lynch said she needed to ask legislative leaders why that was. Meanwhile, he urged, "we all must stand together as legal efforts are made to block the Weaver's Cove approval, and to make sure the Keyspan plan is not reinstated."

Hodgkin said the state has been doing a lot that has not been visible. Lynch said there also has been a ground swell of citizen

Former governor Sundlun reverses position on LNG

Former Governor Bruce Sundlun, who identified himself in early July as a candidate for the position of Jamestown town administrator, has done a flipflop on his position on a liquefied natural gas facility using Narragansett Bay as a transportation route.

In June, Sundlun was for it. Now he is against it.

On June 2, he wrote to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission that he supported the proposal for the Weaver's Cove LNG complex in Fall River, Mass. He did not give his position on the Keyspan LNG plan for Providence. He wrote several paragraphs citing the support given by President Bush in May for LNG facilities.

"I fully understand the potential safety and environmental impacts. . . . I also understand that mitigation measures can, and will be taken . . . the obvious advantage of a new, secure natural gas supply . . . benefit (of) the developer converting a contaminated, certified brownfield into a usable tax producing business location . . . saving taxpayers millions of dollars to convert that present wasteland into a viable taxable entity . . . supplying several hundred local jobs," Sundlun wrote in June.

He agreed with the FERC staff report that Weaver's Cove would meet safety standards and that "the Coast Guard plan for LNG vessels . . . will further ensure the public safety." He concluded in the June 2 letter that "appropriate authorities have decided this proposal based on the facts. I encourage and urge approval."

The FERC approved the Weaver's Cove plan on June 30, effective July 15.

In a July 27 letter acknowledged Aug. 8 by the FERC, Sundlun wrote that "sometime after June 20, I wrote you another letter requesting that my June 2 letter be withdrawn. This letter is a second request that you withdraw my first letter from the file."

He explained in the July 27 letter, "I have had an opportunity to review material from the Coalition for Responsible Siting of LNG Facilities, as well as to read some of the briefs that have been recently filed in the State of Rhode Island. As a resident of Jamestown, I do not feel I can support the Weaver's Cove Facility."

The FERC has not acknowledged receipt of a second letter from Sundlun, based on its files for the Weaver's Cove docket. As of Aug. 16, Sundlun's original letter remained in the FERC files.

action. He cited two Web sites available for the opposition: risafeenergy.org, and nolng.org.

The speakers concluded that there may have been competition or disagreement earlier this year between the governor and attorney general about strategy, but now everyone is co-operating to create an effective defense against LNG proposals.

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