

Coast Guard recommendation renews LNG port controversy

By Phil Zahodiakin

The U.S. Coast Guard's recent conclusion that Mt. Hope Bay is a "suitable" location for liquefied natural gas (LNG) shipments has sparked renewed outrage among opponents of the proposed facility.

Shipping LNG to Mt. Hope Bay would require closing the Pell Bridge every time a loaded tanker approached, and passed away from, the bridge. In addition, enforceable exclusion zones around LNG tankers – typically 1,000 feet on each side, a mile astern and two miles ahead – would shut down the East Passage during every north-bound transit.

A "letter of recommendation" explaining and qualifying the Coast Guard's finding was sent to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), which regulates natural gas transmission facilities, on July 30.

Coast Guard Public Affairs Officer Lt. Erik Halvorson stressed that the letter from Captain of the Port Raymond Perry does not say, "We're approving the project or even endorsing the project. We're just looking at whether or not the waterways can be suitable as far as navigational and maritime safety are concerned. What [Cpt. Perry] said is that the waterways should be considered suitable if all the mitigation measures [specified by the Coast Guard letter] are included by FERC" in a permit for the facility.

The specifics of several safety measures, such as bridge closings and vessel escorts, were redacted from the publicly available letter due to "sensitive security information."

Otherwise, the letter suggests the development of a "transit management plan," the use of four "tractor tugboats" for every tanker entry and exit, and special training for harbor pilots and tugboat drivers.

It will be at least a year before FERC decides if it will issue a permit for a LNG terminal in Mt. Hope Bay. However, the additional mitigation has not eased opposition to the facility. As Rhode Island Sens. Jack Reed (D) and Sheldon Whitehouse (D) said in a joint statement, the Coast Guard "fails to take the big picture into account. The scope of the proposed project and its attendant safety measures will crowd out other water users ... and place a tremendous burden on taxpayers and local law enforcement."

Weaver's Cove Energy, which has sought a permit since 2003, originally proposed to site a LNG terminal on the banks of the lower Taunton River in Fall River, where a conventional gas-storage facility already exists. But the Coast Guard considered that site "unsuitable" because of safety and navigational risks during LNG transit past the Braga Bridge, and both Brightman Street bridges.

Under the revised proposal, unveiled in April 2008, the LNG tankers would berth at an offshore terminal about two miles south of the Braga Bridge. From there, the cryogenically cold gas would flow through a 4.25-mile pipeline leading to a huge storage tank that would be built at the originally proposed site.

Notwithstanding any addi-

tional mitigation, Rhode Island Attorney General Patrick Lynch told the Jamestown Press that the Coast Guard recommendation "will serve as a rallying cry to people who thought that this was all over when, in fact, these very deep-pocketed interests are forging ahead to reap enormous profits while, at the same time, causing ruination to our waterways and our beautiful state."

Lynch also blasted the description of the alternative terminal as "offshore" when "it would be just a mile east of the heavily populated shoreline of Fall River, and 24 miles inland in one of our busiest bays. Moreover, the proposal is disrespectful to the men and women of the Coast Guard: their lives could be threatened if, God forbid, something went wrong with one of the supertankers jammed down our throats."

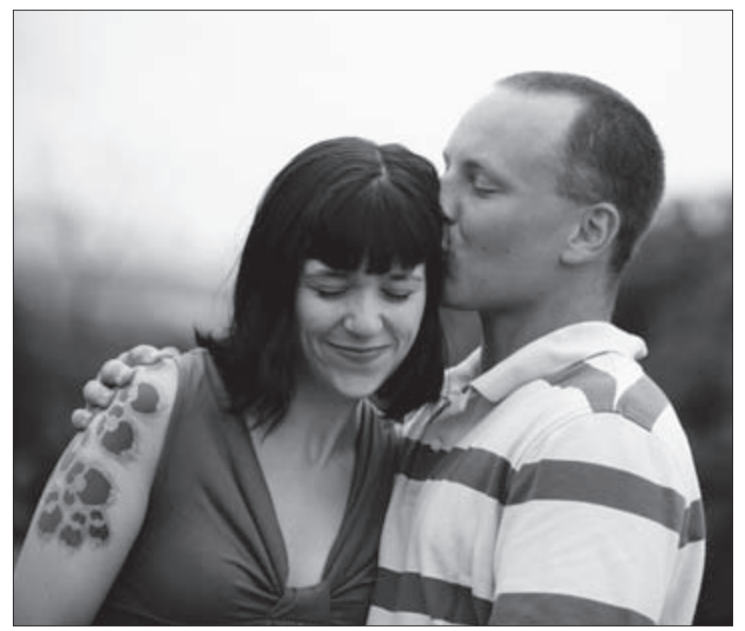
Lynch said he intends to use every means possible "to stop this facility." He also expressed frustration with FERC, which "has granted industry 33 meetings, whereas we had to fight to get just one. And the industry meetings were all held behind closed doors, whereas our meeting was a time-limited public meeting."

If FERC issues a permit for the facility, a likely legal response from opponents of the plan will focus on the pending environmental impact statement (EIS) from

FERC. However, John Torgan – Narragansett baykeeper for Save the Bay – noted that "the first opportunity for the public to weigh in on the draft EIS is coming up because we expect FERC to issue the draft in September. I can't pre-judge the EIS, but, so far, we haven't been impressed by the quality of environmental information that Weaver's Cove has been producing" for FERC review.

Once the draft EIS is issued, the permitting timeline will unfold over a roughly 10-month period, although "there will be many opportunities for twists and turns," Torgan said. "There will be a 60-day public comment period on the draft EIS – or 120 days if they grant the extension we will request. Then, there will be at least two public hearings, one in Fall River and one in Bristol. Then, there will be an indefinite period, probably four to five months, in which FERC prepares the final EIS. Sixty days after that, FERC will issue its record of decision – so we're looking at early summer 2010."

Torgan added, "The full congressional delegations of both affected states are against this facility, and that's not for nothing. They should try to get the president to step in because he could stop this thing with the stroke of a pen."



Beaulieu, Thomas to wed

Rosia and Edward Beaulieu of Jamestown have announced the engagement of their daughter, Sara-Anne, to Mike Thomas, the son of Karen and Edward Thomas Sr. of Westford, Mass.

Thomas grew up in Acton, Mass. and is employed at the Concord Country Club. Beaulieu is a native of Jamestown, and teaches at the Massachusetts College of Art and Fisher College.

They will wed on May 15, 2010.

Schock to paint portrait demo tonight

See new works by artist David Schock tonight, Aug. 6, from 5 to 10 p.m. at the Schock Gallery in Jamestown. Schock recently won the "best family portraits" award in *Rhode Island Monthly* magazine's "Best of Rhode Island" awards.

Schock will also paint a portrait demo from 5 to 7 p.m.

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