

TOWN COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES
Environmental Committee
Town Hall Council Chambers
June 1, 2015, Monday

Present: Brian McDonald , Chairperson
Robert Conlon, Vice Chair
Jane Hackett, Councilor
Kenneth DiFazio, Councilor
Thomas J. Lacey, Councilor

Also Present: Kathleen Deree, Town Clerk
Rebecca Haugh, District One Councilor
James Clarke, Director of Planning

Recording Secretary: Mary Barker

Chairman McDonald called the meeting to order at 6:48 PM.

Issue – Discuss Spectra Energy Natural Gas Compression Station

Chairman McDonald reported that this matter was opened in deference to Councilor Haugh, who has been commendable in her action at the FERC hearings so far. She prepared a resolution to present to the Council that will be deliberated later in the Council’s meeting for same night action. He noted he may have some suggestion for language to include in the resolution.

He also noted that an invitation was extended to Spectra to appear, but there were scheduling conflicts. The hearings that have been held in town have been highly attended. This is a neighborhood (North Weymouth) that has been put upon for many years.

Councilor Haugh and Planning Director Clarke were invited to the table. Councilor Haugh reported the comment period closes June 5th and 11th. She was approached by the Mayor about the proposition to put in a gas compressor in December. A meeting was held by Spectra on 1/28 although an emergency had been declared by the Governor due to snow on the 26th. A second meeting on March 19, 2015 was better attended. The issue she had with the meetings was that no formal presentation was made until this past Wednesday. Before that it was basically a walk-in with no one present to which they could address questions. The site location and other specifications have changed between meetings. She took a site tour of another compressor location in Oxford, Connecticut on April 7, 2015. She noted that location is in a sparsely populated area; there were only about twenty houses in a 4-mile stretch. The first thing she noticed was a strong odor of gas. The unit employs one person. The compressor and security controls are remotely manned by computer.

After leaving the site she decided to write a letter opposing the station, since the suggested site in Weymouth differs and proposes a much greater impact. Jim Clarke provided the perspective from the administration. He noted that the Mayor attended and spoke in opposition at both public meetings and noted the testimony from the May 27, 2015 meeting. She also circulated and requested input from the other departments and their comments citing noise, air quality, safety, etc. which will be submitted to FERC on June 5th. They also are looking to bring in legal counsel and are committed to working with North Weymouth and the Council to let the Regulatory Commission know this isn’t the right spot.

Chairman McDonald noted that FERC is entirely independent and precluded from writing letters in opposition. There was a discussion as to whether FERC is completely autonomous. Mr. Clarke noted that as a regulatory agency it has wide latitude, but must follow the public process. Councilor Haugh noted that FERC does not have to comply with local zoning. Their strategy should be highlighting those areas to focus on- at a local level, they need to show what a bad choice this is. These people don’t live in Weymouth and for them, it’s the cheapest fit. There are alternatives. After the last hearing, she also contacted Senator Markey and Warren’s offices although she is unsure what they can do.

Councilor Lacey asked who the approval authority is. Councilor Haugh responded that it is FERC with US Army Corps of Engineers and other agency approvals. The only local board they are required to go before is the Conservation Commission. Vice Chairman Conlon suggested they could shore up their position by offering alternative location sites. Councilor Haugh noted the alternatives are Rehoboth, Boxford and one other along the Algonquin line- all of which are rural and less populated. Councilor McDonald noted there is no other site in the country that is located in a similar siting as Weymouth. Councilor Haugh put forth a resolution for consideration:

“Whereas, the proposed gas compressor property overlooks Wessagusset, the oldest settlement in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, as known as the Thomas Weston Colony of 1622, and

Whereas, the municipalities of Weymouth and Quincy are communities of historic significance in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, notably, as birthplaces of Abigail Smith Adams, John Adams and John Quincy Adams, and

Whereas, the proposed gas compressor property is next to the Fore River, a significant estuary in the Boston Harbor Watershed, which is formed by the confluence of the Monatiquot River and Smelt Brook in the Weymouth Landing area of Braintree, and

Whereas, the proposed gas compressor property borders both Quincy Point and the North Weymouth Business District, which are two distinct villages of geographic, economic and historical importance, and

Whereas, there are 964 households within a half mile radius of the proposed gas compressor station, significantly higher than the demographics of existing compressor stations, and

Whereas, there is no sufficient data to present the effects the daily operations of a gas compressor station has on such a densely populated area to include noise, smell and air quality, and

Whereas, should an emergency arise at the compressor station, Weymouth and Quincy first responders are not allowed to enter the property until representatives from Spectra Energy are present, and

Whereas, should an evacuation be ordered at the compressor station, Weymouth and Quincy would be responsible for tens of thousands of people needing to vacate the area, and

Whereas, any evacuation at the proposed gas compressor station will shut down Route 3A, a state highway that connects Weymouth to Quincy and transports more than 33,000 vehicles a day, and

Whereas, the Fore River Bridge, which sits adjacent to the proposed gas compressor station, is currently under construction at a contract cost of \$244 million and is currently scheduled to be completed in mid-2017, and

Whereas, the proposed gas compressor station region currently houses a gasoline/oil depot, a chemical plant, two power plants with transmission lines, a regional sewage pump station, a sewage pelletizing plant, a hazardous waste transfer and treatment facility, and smaller oil storage facilities/tanks, and

Whereas, The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) uses the term “Overburdened Community” to describe low-income and minority communities that potentially experience disproportionate environmental harms and risks due to exposures or cumulative impacts or greater vulnerability in response to President Clinton signing his Environmental Justice executive order in 1993 to protect citizens from being overburdened with potential environmental hazards, and

Whereas, Quincy Point and Germantown in Quincy are recognized as Environmental Justice neighborhoods by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs for having a high minority and/or low-income population, and

Whereas, the construction of a gas compressor station in Weymouth will not provide any much needed jobs or economic stimulus to the region as the station is controlled remotely out of Houston, Texas, and

Whereas, the proposed gas compressor station will render abutting conservation land useless as the Town of Weymouth was awarded a conservation restriction to the 2.9 acre King's Cove parcel for public conservation and passive recreation through mitigation obligations under the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection Chapter 91 in 1991, and

Resolved, the Town Council of the Town of Weymouth urges the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to seek an alternate site for the proposed new gas compressor station under Spectra Energy/Algonquin Gas's Atlantic Bridge Project, Docket Number PF15-12-000 which is more rural and less densely populated as those gas compressor stations that are currently in existence.

Now, therefore, on June 1, 2015, the Town Council of Weymouth urges its state and federal delegation of elected officials to support an alternate site for the proposed new gas compressor station under Spectra Energy/Algonquin Gas's Atlantic Bridge Project, Docket Number PF15-12-000 as a matter of paramount concern to the citizens of Weymouth."

Chairman McDonald suggested including language that as a result of the construction, if permitted, the language include:

"Whereas, the construction of a gas compressor station in Weymouth will not provide any much needed long term or economic stimulus to the region as the station is controlled remotely out of Houston, Texas, and"

Councilor Haugh was amenable to changing the language.

A motion was made by Councilor Hackett to forward the matter to the full Town Council with a recommendation to adopt the resolution as proposed and amended and was seconded by Councilor Lacey. UNANIMOUSLY VOTED.

Chairman McDonald also suggested the committee consider what could happen if they are unsuccessful in blocking this; they should pursue mitigation as tenaciously as possible and the Council should be on record as having done so.

A motion was made by Councilor Hackett to recommend the Council entertain pursuit of mitigation and was seconded by Councilor Lacey. Councilor Hackett suggested it might show a lack of resolve; they do not want to show weakness. Vice Chairman Conlon suggested it is too early in the process to suggest mitigation. Mr. Clarke was asked at what part in the process should discussion of mitigation happen. Mr. Clarke responded that it is several months before this needs to happen; it's still in the citing stage.

Chairman McDonald suggested that they should forward the letter from resident John McDonough since it has strong solid research pertinent to the discussion.

Councilor Hackett withdrew her motion and Councilor Lacey the second.

ADJOURNMENT

At 7:19PM, there being no further business, a motion was made by Councilor Hackett to adjourn the meeting and was seconded by Councilor Lacey. UNANIMOUSLY VOTED.

Respectfully submitted by Mary Barker as Recording Secretary

Approved by Councilor McDonald as Chairman of the Environmental Committee
Voted unanimously by Town Council on 24 August 2015