

Towns approve resolutions opposing Burrillville power plant

NK Council hears large group of area residents concerned about plant's environmental impact

By **KENDRA LOLIO and SHAUN KIRBY**

COVENTRY — Dozens of residents from Burrillville and other municipalities gave impassioned thoughts on their opposition to the state's push for a new power plant at the North Kingstown Town Council meeting Monday evening. Opposition concerning the environmental impacts of the Clear River Energy Center, a project proposed by Chicago-based firm Invenergy Thermal Development, LLC, is now sending Burrillville citizens on a mission to press Gov. Gina Raimondo to stop its plans to establish the 1,000 megawatt, gas- and diesel-powered cogeneration plant.

The North Kingstown Town

Council approved a resolution supporting the Burrillville Land Trust's and its town council's opposition.

"This shows solidarity, us supporting Burrillville," said Councilwoman Doreen Costa at Monday's meeting. Invenergy submitted an application with the Rhode Island Energy Facility Siting Board (EFSE) in October 2015 to establish the power plant. Since then, about 80 organizations, cities and towns in the state have expressed opposition

to either the plant itself or the Burrillville sub-building inspector and tax assessor also submitted advisory opinions to the EFSE expressing the impact that the proposed project would have on the town. The matter has been a concern for residents

in a timely manner. Roselli, speaking before the Coventry Town Council earlier in the evening, said the campus will be about 64 acres with the potential to grow to 80 acres. He noted there would be two smokestacks that would be rising 240 feet at a grade of 587 feet, making it one of the tallest places in Rhode Island if constructed. It would need to be lit 24 hours a day and would use about 700 gallons of water per minute, 40 percent of which would be returned. He said the center would be the largest new energy project in all of New England if it is built.

That water will come from the City of Johnston after its council approved a \$18.5 million agreement last week, one which Woonsocket declined just days prior.

Invenergy is the largest independent wind power company in North America and the 4th largest overall. They are also the largest operator of energy storage systems in the U.S. with over 10,000 MW of assets, according to official EFSE documents. They have developed seven solar projects in the region.

fracked power plant in the middle of the woods next to thousands of acres of preserved land, without a word from the town and citizens" said Paul Roselli of the Burrillville Land Trust. "We are all environmentalists, whether we like it or not. North Kingstown has historically approved open space bonds. 21 municipalities throughout the state have joined us in supporting this resolution [which] will go a long way to showing state government officials that the power plant is not necessary and

-Pat

Speakers: Raimondo not considering residents in push for new power plant

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The Clear River Energy Center is expected to be an approximately \$700 million investment. Their commercial operation date for the project is June 1, 2019 with a 30-month construction schedule. The land already has a gas transmission line and high voltage power line running through it, making it a desired location.

In their documentation to the EFSE, Invenergy claims that the center will create 350 building trade union construction jobs as well as 25 permanent skilled positions. They also claim that the project will generate millions of dollars in new tax revenue for the town of Burrillville and will provide cleaner energy and healthier air.

The resolution to support the town passed the council on a 4-1 vote, with Councilman Richard Welch the lone dissenter. In Coventry, Councilman Kerry McGee also entered the only opposing vote.

"I think the Town of Coventry doesn't belong getting involved," McGee said. "We have enough issues of our own. We need the energy, we need the construction jobs. I can't support this."

With reporting from Russ Olivo

RI leaders oppose fed rail plans

By KENDRA GRAVELLE

CHARLESTOWN — The widespread opposition among residents of Southern Rhode Island to the proposed Old Saybrook to Kenyon Bypass proposed as part of the recommendations by the Federal Railway Administration (FRA) for improving the Northeast Corridor (NEC) has been met with a show of solidarity from many Rhode Island House and Senate leaders.

A letter of support addressed to the FRA was released Tuesday and includes the names of 17 state leaders representing "every House and Senate district in Washington County."

"While we support rail service and support efforts to increase the efficiency of rail travel," the letter reads, "we have serious concerns about the proposal, specifically the Old Saybrook-Kenyon bypass through Connecticut and Rhode Island."

Charlestown Town Council Vice President Julie Carroccia met Wednesday with Gov. Gina Raimondo's chief of staff and other administrators to discuss the town's opposition.

"This is the Governor's chance to be a hero," Carroccia said Wednesday. "This is an opportunity for her to win with us. The Governor is the only one who can influence this now."

The "NEC Future" initiative released last month its Tier 1 final environmental impact statement (EIS), which includes recommendations for straightening railway lines and adding tracks in Southern Rhode Island.

The 30-year project is meant to straighten the route from Washington D.C. to Boston, and could shave 45 minutes off trips from Boston to New York City, with trains traveling at speeds up to 220 miles per hour. To complete the entire project could cost as much as \$130 billion.

"We explained to them how flawed the EIS was," Carroccia said. "We gave them a lot of information — detailed maps, five pages of deficiencies in the

FRA analysis, and asked them to take the Saybrook to Kenyon Bypass out of the plan — that's our ask."

Brett Smiley, Raimondo's chief of staff, explained Wednesday that the Governor would wait to give her recommendation until she hears from the Division of Planning. Following that meeting, Lee and Carroccia met with state planning members Wednesday.

Representative Blake Filippi was also in attendance.

"He's been very supportive," Carroccia said. "It feels good when your representatives show up to fight something with you."

In the letter declaring opposition from the state General Assembly, it is noted the bypass would go through "wetlands, aquifers, nature preserves, designated open space, private property and farmland. The effect this project would have on southwestern Rhode Island would be enormous."

A map depicting the proposed line shows as many as 15 of Charlestown's protected open space properties, the Frances C. Carter Memorial Preserve, the Amos Green Farm and the Pawcatuck River could all be damaged if the plans are to go forward.

"The information that was provided to the Governor by the FRA didn't include all kinds of things that you would consider to be showstoppers," Carroccia said, "that the proposed track goes over the tribal land and all the conservation easements that are going to be impacted."

Property values in Charlestown would likely decrease, as well, Carroccia said.

"Connecticut said [the EIS] dropped property values by 25 percent," she said. "Even if they never do this, if your house is on that track, you're not going to be able to sell it. Everybody that's in that path has a permanent cloud hanging over their property."

Carroccia added that the probability of several lawsuits was brought up during

Wednesday's meeting, as well. "All those conservation easements that are in perpetuity," she said, "we have to defend those. The town has to defend those. The state has to defend those."

After 500 citizens turned out to a special meeting held at Charlestown Elementary School Jan. 10 to protest the Tier 1 EIS, town councilors held a conference call last Friday with the FRA to address the town's concerns. Included in the call were staff members from the Rhode Island Division of Planning and representatives from the Governor's office.

"[The FRA] was very non-committal," Carroccia said of the conference call.

A petition opposing the EIS has also been circulating and has gathered 2,500 signatures.

"We understand the need for faster transportation. We're not trying to stay back in the previous century," Carroccia said. "What we're saying is, 'look at what makes sense.' If you look at the topography — they're going to have to do tunneling, which is going to slow down the train to 100 miles an hour. It doesn't make sense. It doesn't accomplish what they say this is supposed to accomplish."

The FRA pledged to visit Charlestown before the end of January.

"We don't have any commitment as to when," Carroccia said, "but we're pushing every way we can."

Although plans for a visit from the FRA haven't yet been finalized, Carroccia said a meeting with the association would likely be open for public attendance.

Impacted communities have until Jan. 31 to respond to the recommendations for improving the NEC, after which time a final record of decision will be made.

"We continue to hope that the Governor will help us," Carroccia said. "We're going to continue to press forward. If we stop, we lose."