

For Foes Of LNG, Image Says It All



By Robert Knox, Globe Correspondent
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What's the cost of putting a liquefied natural gas terminal on one of the Boston Harbor Islands?

It's the priceless view of Boston Harbor and Boston Light, one of the best known landmarks on the Massachusetts coast, according to Save The Brewsters, a grass-roots organization based in Hull that has put up a roadside billboard on busy Route 3A pointing to what it says would be lost if the LNG terminal were built.

The billboard, erected on the Weymouth side of the Fore River Bridge, features a colorful photograph of the harbor islands, including Outer Brewster Island -- the site of the proposed facility -- and its neighbor, Little Brewster, home to Boston Light. Jumping off the ad is the Hull group's fundamental message: "The Harbor Islands Are Not For Sale."

In a statement, the group said siting the terminal on Outer Brewster would "irreparably destroy natural habitat and marine wildlife, including the harbor's only major seal population, on and surrounding Outer Brewster Island while destroying a National Park, meant to be preserved for all and not sold for short-term interests."

The organization said it put up the billboard to counter efforts by the company proposing the LNG terminal and the public relations firm it hired, Regan Communications, to persuade the Legislature to approve putting the facility on the island, part of the Boston Harbor Islands National Recreation Area.

AES Inc. of Arlington, Va., wants a 99-year lease to build a \$500 million LNG regasification plant on the island, which is 2 miles from the Hull shore and about 8 miles from downtown Boston. A legislative hearing on a bill to remove the island's state park designation, a step toward granting a lease, will take place next month.

AES is one of the world's largest energy companies, with operations in 26 countries. While its proposal to build on Outer Brewster requires a two-thirds vote of both houses of the Legislature,

its opponents say they are afraid the regional energy situation might lead some legislators to support the company's plan.

Many people are under the erroneous impression that the LNG terminal in Everett would close if a new one were to be built on the harbor island, said Lory Newmyer, a spokeswoman for Save The Brewsters and also the executive director of the Hull Lifesaving Museum.

Since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, state and local officials have worried about the possibility of an assault on a tanker serving the Suez-Distrigas LNG terminal in Everett, close to the population center of Boston. But Newmyer said that since different companies would own the facilities, the opening of one would have no consequences for the other.

Proponents have cited the region's growing hunger for natural gas in pushing for another LNG terminal in New England. AES has also sought to bring the local advantages of the plan home to Hull residents, saying that an estimated \$3.5 million a year in property taxes on the facility would go to their town.

Jason Lefferts of Regan Communications said his company has made this argument with Hull officials.

"The overwhelming [benefit] is, frankly, the money," he said, pointing out that \$3.5 million would be a significant bump to the town's tax levy. The town currently collects \$19.3 million a year in property taxes, according to the assessors' department.

Lefferts said the \$3.5 million could be used to help pay for the town's long-term capital needs, such as school projects and maintenance of the local beaches and harbor.

Hull selectmen opposed quick approval of the proposal last fall, but are still studying the issue. Newmyer said she hopes the board will take a position before the Legislative committee hearing on March 8.

She questions proponents' argument that New England needs another terminal to receive its supply of natural gas.

In fact, LNG facilities are national suppliers, she said, and a terminal on Outer Brewster would serve "anywhere in the whole country, not just New England." So while New England would gain no special benefit from a second terminal, the Boston area would undertake a bigger burden -- and an increased security risk, Newmeyer said.

She said such a facility would mar the natural attractions of the harbor and its islands -- the point of her group's billboard.

The average LNG tanker ship is 900 feet long, 150 feet wide, and 120 feet tall -- and would dwarf Boston Light, at 89 feet tall with a diameter of only 22 feet, according to Save The

Brewsters. Furthermore, construction work would destroy fisheries near the island, and the presence of the tankers would deny the area's waters to boaters, Newmyer said.

But Lefferts said AES proposes to make significant efforts to reduce the effect of the facility on the Harbor Islands park system.

AES plans to build most of the facility underground, with the tanks protruding only 20 to 30 feet above the island's current horizon. The plant would be sited on the north side of the island, the side farthest away from Point Allerton in Hull and a safe distance from the town, he said.

Those efforts are not likely to mollify the company's opponents. Newmyer said that even if state and national policy makers decide a new LNG terminal is needed, "a national park is the wrong place."

The billboard pushing that view on Route 3A motorists will be up for a month. Save The Brewsters says the ad costs \$1,500, paid for by donations to the group.

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