

Plymouth board backs building permit issued to Pilgrim for nuclear waste storage

Plymouth board backs building permit issued for nuke waste storage

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The Patriot Ledger

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PLYMOUTH — Anti-nuclear activists failed Wednesday night to convince town zoning board of appeals members that the Pilgrim nuclear power plant overstepped local land-use laws when it began building a new storage facility for its spent nuclear waste a year ago.

The board voted 3-2 to reject an appeal from residents who wanted to force the operators of Pilgrim to apply for a special permit for its expanded waste storage project.

Running out of space in wet pools to store the radioactive waste, the plant plans to expand to a dry-cask storage system next year.

But **16 residents** teamed up with local lawyers to challenge the permitting process for the aging plant.

Margaret Sheehan, a lawyer from Cambridge who grew up in Plymouth, argued Wednesday night that in the 1970s and 1980s, it was common for Pilgrim to apply for special permits when it built additions to the plant.

“But in the early '90s we come to this alleged understanding between Pilgrim and the building department,” Sheehan said. “It was an iron curtain of secrecy.”

Sheehan, who is part of a nonprofit organization called EcoLaw, said she plans to appeal the appeals board's decision.

Richard Serkey, a lawyer for Entergy Corp., which operates the nuclear plant, said that because storage of nuclear waste is a necessary part of any nuclear plant, construction of additional storage should not require a special permit.

“Since 1989, there were 17 successive zoning permits (issued to Pilgrim) without the need for special permits,” said Serkey, who is also a former member of the Plymouth Zoning Board of Appeals.

The hearing, which drew a crowd of more than 60 people, came three months after Plymouth selectmen rebuked top officials and inspectors from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission during an annual assessment of Pilgrim.

Selectmen cited the 2011 nuclear disaster in Fukushima, Japan, saying sentiment toward Pilgrim had soured in Plymouth, and they called for better communication from the NRC on evacuation plans, nuclear waste storage and defense against possible terrorism.

Pilgrim, which began operating in 1972, won a new 20-year license last year from the NRC, but the review process dragged on for six years, the longest such review in NRC history.

Delays in relicensing were caused largely by a series of challenges filed by the state attorney general and by Pilgrim Watch, a watchdog group led by Duxbury resident Mary Lampert. Lampert's husband, attorney James Lampert, also argued at Wednesday night's hearing.

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Meg Sheehan Rank 82

I would like to clarify that I am not an "anti-nuclear activist" as this article claims. Nor are all of the 18 local residents who I represent. Many of them are abutters to Entergy's Pilgrim reactor and have lived there all or most of their lives.



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