



PUBLIC COMMENT, DETACHED GARAGE: A gate to nowhere

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By Frank Mand**Wicked Local Plymouth**

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PLYMOUTH — After two days of hearings the public got its chance to comment on Building Inspector Paul McAuliffe's decision to allow Energy to build dry-cask storage units at Pilgrim without being subjected to the special permit process.

The board heard from residents of Duxbury, Harwich and Marshfield, who cited the potential economic ramifications of the project, the place of common sense in the process, and how the open process would reassure the town's neighbors.

Plymouth resident Fay Melzer pointed out that more than 40 years ago the plant's owners patronized her with assurances that the fuel pool was for temporary storage and cooling of spent-fuel assemblies — not permanent storage.

But the most powerful argument for greater scrutiny of Entergy's dry-cask storage plans may have come from the quietest voice, and his story of the "gate to nowhere."

Norman Pierce lives down a dirt road, off Long Pond Road.

Before offering the Zoning Board of Appeals his story, Pierce asked for the members' indulgence. The chemotherapy that he endures in his battle with leukemia — which he believes is associated with the presence of the nuclear plant — often leaves him unable to select the most effective words, he said.

Then in a soft, low voice Pierce began to talk about his detached garage.

"In 1999 I came before the board seeking to build a detached garage," Pierce said slowly, almost mysteriously.

Because the garage would be sited within 70 feet of a pond, Pierce said, he was required to make a variety of modifications.

"It was a very intensive process, with a lot of detail, and it left me with respect for what the board does, and the detail they have to juggle," Pierce said. "And it also left with me a desire to see that we are all being treated fairly and evenly under the law."

Pierce paused, as if to take a deep breath.

"I had to have a walkway to the house, and a railing, to make sure this was considered an addition to the house, though it was many yards away," Pierce said. "A small gate was also required, because there was a right of way, for anyone who came across the pond to visit a small cemetery with just six or eight graves."

He has never seen anyone come across the pond with the intention of visiting that small graveyard, but, Pierce said, "The board felt that they had to think of the future and so, fine, I have a gate to nowhere."

Pierce paused again.

"The reason I bring this up," he said slowly, "is that you can see how careful the board has been in the past about these issues, and I kind of wonder, I mean I trust that (the appeals board) will want the same sort of oversight for this project."

The board was not going to give away its last chance to have a say in the design and environmental monitoring of this facility, Pierce said confidently. "Or, if you do, in the future I hope you treat homeowners the same way," he said.

Turning to Entergy's recent actions, Pierce's tone became more clearly derisive.

Some residents of town, who have to go through the normal permitting process, have lost trust in that process because of how they see Entergy behaving without consequence, he said.

"Through (aerial) photography we learned that the dry cask construction process had begun without any permits," Pierce said, "but then permits were granted."

"Could I have gotten the same treatment?" Pierce asked rhetorically. "I'm pretty sure that you would not let me get away with that."

So all I am asking is that (the board) use the same standards," Pierce said. "I need to trust you. This is your last shot at having a say in the siting of the dry cask units."

Nine people asked and were given the opportunity to speak in favor of the appeal.

After one woman who apparently supported Energy asked for a clarification of the amount of dry cask units that would be required to store all of Pilgrim's spent fuel rod assemblies, no one else came forward to support Entergy's position.

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