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On May 24, the newly formed Massachusetts Nuclear Decommissioning Citizens Advisory Panel will convene for its first meeting, at Plymouth South High School.

By Heather M. Lightner

On May 24, the newly formed Massachusetts Nuclear Decommissioning Citizens Advisory Panel will convene for its first meeting, at Plymouth South High School. Formed through legislation last year, the 21 member committee will advise the governor, the general assembly, and the public on matters related to the decommissioning of Pilgrim Nuclear Power Station, which is slated to close on or before May 31, 2019.

The panel – comprised of state energy experts, legislators, local officials, union representatives, and area citizens – is required to meet quarterly until the shutdown of Pilgrim to discuss issues related to decommissioning planning activities. Following plant closure, NDCAP will continue to hold a minimum of four public meetings each year to the review issues related to the progress of the decommissioning.

Members of NDCAP will periodically receive reports on the Decommissioning Trust Fund, financial data related to decommissioning, and decommissioning plans – including site assessments and post-shutdown decommissioning assessment reports. The panel will in turn generate a written report, which will be submitted annually to the governor and to the energy committees of the General Court.
Perhaps NDCAP's greatest responsibility will be to convey complex information to the public so that residents of the commonwealth can become active participants in the decommissioning process. Although NDCAP is advisory only, the panel does have the capability to represent the interests of Plymouth, Pilgrim's host community, and other surrounding communities. It can also influence decisions related to decommissioning. In order to accomplish this goal, the panel will need the active involvement of the public.

The potential implications involved in decommissioning should be taken seriously by ALL residents, not just those in Plymouth. Residents have an obligation and duty to inform themselves, ask the tough questions, and demand answers. Will there be enough money to complete decommissioning? Who will pay the difference if the funds prove insufficient? Should the plant be sold to the third-party contractor Northstar for decommissioning, and if so, is the company and its partners financially solvent? Who will pay for long-term storage of spent fuel at Pilgrim? What else can be done to improve storage of this high-level waste stored so closely to Cape Cod Bay? Will there be ongoing offsite emergency planning following shutdown, and if so, who will pay for it? Will there continue to be onsite monitoring of tritium and offsite radiation monitoring? Should parts of the facility be crushed and stored underground onsite? What is the acceptable level of allowable radiation at the site post shutdown? Will the land ever be restored to “greenfield” status?

Independent of differing opinions regarding Pilgrim we can all agree that our communities deserve the best economic and environmental decommissioning plan possible and safer storage of high-level nuclear waste. Now is the time to put our differences aside to collectively advocate for the town of Plymouth and the commonwealth.

The NDCAP meeting is open to the public and will be held from 6 to 8 p.m. Wednesday, May 24, at Plymouth South High School, 490 Long Pond Road Plymouth.

Heather M. Lightner is a registered nurse and is a Plymouth resident. She is president of Concerned Neighbors of Pilgrim, a local, grassroots group focused on safer storage of spent nuclear fuel at Pilgrim, and works closely with Cape Cod Bay Watch. She is also a
former member of the Plymouth Nuclear Matters Committee and is a member of the Nuclear Decommissioning Citizens Advisory Panel.