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### LINES IN THE SAND

# Jack Spillane: Acushnet, and SouthCoast, need help with big LNG plant

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By Jack Spillane [Follow](#)

Posted Jun. 11, 2016 at 3:38 PM  
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On sleepy Peckham Road in the North End of Acushnet, the "No LNG" signs are everywhere now.

The same thing over the town line in the Sassaquin neighborhood of the far North End of New Bedford.

The owners of both the modest ranch houses and the more upscale garrisons aren't buying Eversource's assurances that there's nothing to be worried about.

And it didn't help this week when Acushnet Fire Chief Kevin Gallagher angrily made public that a last-minute addition to language in Eversource's design for the massive LNG plant could allow it to use trucks to load and deliver liquefied natural gas.

The language was astonishing given the utility's assurances that the new plant would be even less dangerous than the current one because all the gas would be delivered by pipeline rather than trucking, as is currently the case. Pipeline delivery is said to be inherently safer than the process for transfer by truck.

Here's what the fine print said: "The trucking facilities will also be capable of supporting LNG loading and delivery for distribution in the Northeast, should commercial arrangement for such deliveries be entered into at a future point."

Eversource's staff public relations spokesman quickly attempted to put out the gas fire, so to speak.

The utility needs to have access in an emergency situation in order to truck LNG offsite, said Michael Durand, seeming to convey that the utility really had no choice but to include the language allowing large-scale hauling.

But then why include a line about supporting and loading for commercial distribution some day in the future? Who wanted that provision?

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Attorney General Maura Healey's office has commissioned a study by environmental preservation groups that found there's no real need for adding additional LNG capacity in New England, that alternative energy — the only way in the long run to prevent climate change — can supply the region's future energy needs. Eversource insists they're all for alternative energy too — it's just that the massive new LNG capacity in Acushnet is needed for high energy spikes at the heights of winter and summer. You don't want to go without electricity in a blizzard or air conditioning in a heat wave do you?

It's all so complicated, energy regulation. But the old cliché "It's always about the money," might be a good one to keep in mind.

Any cost of the new Acushnet gas will be passed on to the ratepayers and some worry about the fact that the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission has now approved the sale of natural gas outside the country. The FERC is also going to make the decision on the Acushnet pipeline.

Opponents warn that some day this pipeline might be used to sell gas outside New England, nevermind just to keep those July air conditioners humming. Eversource insists that's not the plan.

Meanwhile, the everyday SouthCoast resident can't help wondering: Is all this the kind of global warming venture we really wants to bet our future on, and possibly safety?

Energy policy, of course, is a complicated national issue so ultimately the decision on whether to allow the massive Acushnet expansion won't be made locally. And as we saw at the proposed Weaver's Cove LNG plant in Fall River, it ultimately took an Act of Congress to defeat it. That was engineered by the inimitable Barney Frank but in Acushnet there's no sign the issue is yet a high priority for Congressman Bill Keating.

Indeed, with the massive infusion of revenue to the town of Acushnet — \$12 million a year — if the expanded plant gets built, there are mixed feelings about it all around. It's really the neighborhoods that immediately abut it — where residents are most keenly vulnerable in their property values — where opposition is most acute.

Ironically, more New Bedford residents live close to the plant than do Acushnet folks but the way federal energy law is written, the city won't receive a dime if the plant get built, as opposed to the huge windfall for Acushnet. The New Bedford mayor is trying to leverage some influence by way of the burden on the city Fire Department but so far has gotten nothing even though the city would certainly be a key responder for any sort of catastrophe.

Catastrophe is another loaded word when it comes to LNG plants since deadly explosions associated with them are exceedingly rare. But then again, it only takes one.

The tale of Acushnet and Eversource and this proposed Peckham Road LNG plant is truly a story of a David and a Goliath. Not so much because the big utility is a bad Goliath as that the stakes are so big and the consequences so immense that a town of 10,000 people is just inherently at a disadvantage trying to wade through.

Hence the comment of Chief Gallagher, who chairs the LNG study committee, when he learned about the last minute language about potential commercial trucking: "We may be country bumpkins, but we deserve some respect and we're not getting it"

State and national leaders have been amazingly quiet about the specifics of the Acushnet proposal.

Since she issued her report on LNG, Attorney General Maura Healey has been silent about Acushnet, saying the proposal needs more study.

Sen. Ed Markey has warned that gas pipeline companies want to use New England as a highway to international markets that could negatively tie New England prices to those outside the country. But neither he nor Sen. Elizabeth Warren has said much about Acushnet.

Gov. Charlie Baker last year quietly approved passing on the cost of gas pipeline improvements to all electric ratepayers, but again little about Acushnet.

Where is the leadership — at the local, the state and national levels — on this big energy issue that will so greatly affect the future of everyone on SouthCoast and in New England?

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Who is looking out for Acushnet and New Bedford? And beyond?

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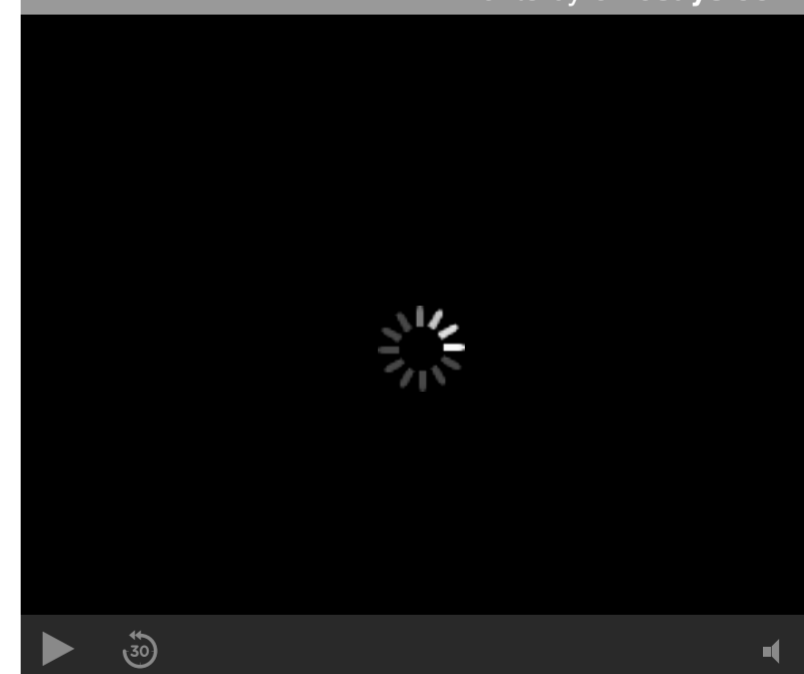
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