

City Holds Workshop On Calais LNG

By: Carol-Ann Nicholson

CALAIS – If the number of professional and technical experts attending a meeting means anything, Calais LNG is on the right track.

There was a large group of such people present at the workshop held at the Washington County Community College last week, April 8, during a workshop conducted by the Calais City Council and the Calais Planning Board. They answered questions about the project and discussed the plans for the project with local people.

Calais Mayor Vinton Cassidy chaired the session and said the purpose of the meeting was to learn more about Calais LNG. He said the evening was not a debate but rather “an informational thing for the city.”

Present to outline plans was Rep. Ian Emery, Cutler, a founder of the project. He said he had been a member of the State Legislature for two terms but was now dedicating himself to the Calais LNG Project.

“I will not be running again but plan to concentrate on the project,” he said.

With Emery was Art Gelber, president of Gelber Corp. from Texas. He is a natural gas industry expert. Gelber had a

short power-point presentation on the project and, in his remarks, said that Calais “is the best site I have seen on the East Coast. It is a gem.”

Gelber said the project would prove 250 jobs during construction and 40 to 60 permanent operations and maintenance jobs.

He noted among the reasons for his assessment are that there are no federally designated wetlands or known endangered species habitats in

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the area of the project, and there is limited commercial fishing and lobster operations in the area. As well, the site location limits visual impacts along Route 1.

"Maine and New England need natural gas to fuel the economy and to protect the environment," he said. "LNG is a bridge fuel to get us through the next series of possibilities. It is the bridge to a renewable future which includes wind, solar and tidal energy."

The Calais LNG proposal is located on a 300 acre site seven miles below Calais on the St. Croix River between Devil's Head and St. Croix Island. It is across the river from the Port of Bayside in Canada.

Gelber says the project would have 128 shoreline acres and 2,899 feet of water-

front. He also says there would be holding tanks on both sides of Route 1.

He noted that there are environmental benefits because liquefied natural gas is the cleanest fossil fuel. It is the most efficient combustible technology available. There would be fewer impacts on the climate, on air and water quality.

"LNG is much cleaner than coal, wood or oil," he said.

He also noted that the site is close to the Maritimes & Northeast Pipeline and suggested there is a possibility that Calais homes and businesses could be connected to natural gas if an energy company was commissioned to act in terms of supply.

Gelber says Goldman Sachs LLC will be the key investor in the project.

He also said that a major focus for the project is the support from the city of Calais. Informal preapplication meetings have already begun as have field studies. Department of Environmental Protection studies and engineering studies required by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission will also get underway. He anticipates a Bureau of Environmental Protection hearing in the winter of 2009 and a draft Federal Energy Regulatory Commission environmental impact statement in 2009.

Gelber said Calais LNG plans to open an office on Main Street in Calais later this month and said there is a website available which is www.CalaisLNG.com

One of the first questions to be asked of Gelber by a Calais City Councilor came from Louis Bernardini. He noted that Canada is saying that it will not allow LNG tankers through Head Harbour Passage and wondered how Gelber planned to resolve the issue.

"It's not easy," Gelber said. He indicated that could be a long battle.

"However, we think the waterway is suitable and safe.

The Canadians bring boats up the river. Large boats go to Bayside, for example. We think we can find a way to resolve the issue. After we do our work we're hopeful our friends will allow the project to go through."

Gail Wahl, a member of the Calais Planning Board, asked Gelber if it would be possible to keep LNG prices stable and low. She also noted LNG is a limited resource.