



LNG forum sparks no arguments in Bandon

By Drew Atkins, Staff Writer

It was a meeting about liquefied natural gas, but there were no outbursts or exchanged insults, nor long denunciations. No one interrupted anyone else and only one person shouted a question out of turn.

In a break from tradition, the first of three public forums on the issue of the proposed liquefied natural gas holding facility and pipeline transpired in an orderly and unemotional manner Wednesday night in Bandon. About 50 people attended to hear representatives from Jordan Cove, Coos Bay Pilots Association, Southwestern Oregon Community College and various environmental groups talk about the proposed projects, as well as the future of energy consumption in America.

The forums are being organized by Camby Collier, a North Bend resident who has been outspoken in her opposition to a LNG holding facility and pipeline in recent city council meetings. The Bandon forum was moderated by Fred Clarke, described by Collier as a "Glasgow resident against the pipeline."

Despite being organized and moderated by opponents of the projects, the gathering was notable for its even-handed approach. Representatives from both sides of the LNG issue were represented, as well as ostensibly neutral experts, such as Drew Emmett of the Coos Bay Pilots Association and Ron Metzger, head of the geology department at the college, who said they were there to help answer questions. Representatives from Williams Northwest, the U.S. Coast Guard, and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers declined to participate in any of the forums, Collier said.

The meeting's two hours were split between panelist presentations and questions and answers, with an hour allocated to each activity.

During panelist presentations, Rory Cox of Ratepayers for Affordable, Clean Energy spoke first. Cox stated that the claim of an impending natural gas shortage was "hype," and there was, therefore, no compelling reason to bring LNG in. Instead, he advocated the development of alternative energy sources. He also showed a graph comparing California's natural gas consumption with that of the northwestern states, to illustrate his argument that California is "really what's driving" the proposed projects.

Bob Braddock, project manager of Jordan Cove Energy Project - the company proposing the holding facility - countered Cox's presentation by spending his allotted time describing how the imported gas would benefit not only California, but the entire Northwest, Coos Bay included.

"There's no region of the U.S. more dependent on imported gas than the Pacific Northwest and Northern California," said Braddock. "All the gas that goes to Northern California goes through Oregon anyway, because most of it comes from Canada. ... The additional supply of gas (this project would bring) would drive down gas prices in the area, because that's what additional supply does. ... A large amount of gas will go to California, no question, but that's not the only place it would go. This would benefit the whole Northwest."

Jody McCaffree, of Citizens Against LNG; and Dan Serres, program coordinator for Friends of Living Oregon Waters, split their presentation time, delivering back-and-forth denunciations of the project. Serres started, reiterating Cox's claim that the project was meant to serve California gas buyers. He went on to say that

there were better ways to develop the area's economy than "cutting a pipeline across 223 miles of Oregon land."

McCaffree said that the International Port of Coos Bay had a long history of "schemes to bring jobs to the area that don't work out." She said the only reason the port wants to bring LNG to the area was so it can place a cargo terminal on the North Spit, near the LNG holding facility.

McCaffree and Serres ended by saying their current goal is to convince the port to commit to an independent study of the positive and negative effects the project may have on the area.

Clarke then stopped the panelists and said, "Now, neighbors, it's our turn," before describing the rules of the question-and-answer portion. Clarke said that audience members could present concerns and facts in the form of questions, but asked that they keep their questions succinct.

The first question of the night came from Bob Fischer, of Bandon, who asked whether planes would be flying right over LNG storage tanks on their way to the Southwest Oregon Regional Airport, and if this presented a needless risk.

Braddock answered by saying that this "was one of the first things we looked at," and that it wasn't the case that airplanes would be flying directly over the tanks.

"We've met with the (Federal Aviation Administration) and airport district, and we're in full compliance with regulations," said Braddock. "But could someone crash a plane into the tank? Yes. They could do that no matter where we place it."

Dale Dempsey, of North Bend, said that "North Bend has a special acoustic nature," and that he was worried that these projects would bring noise pollution to the area.

Braddock answered that "background noise monitors" were already in place throughout North Bend, recording the standard decibel levels of the area, and that the project would not increase those decibel levels.

One of the meeting's more heated exchanges came from a question posed by Jennifer Gumm, of North Bend. Gumm held up a pamphlet from Citizens Against LNG, and said, based on what she'd heard, the pamphlet's claim that LNG ships could cause the area to "lose use of the harbor and airport' ... isn't true." She asked if this was the case.

Braddock said it was, saying that the ships "would not affect airport traffic at all," and while the proposed 80 LNG ships that would visit the port annually would undoubtedly impact harbor traffic, they would not shut it down.

McCaffree defended the pamphlet, which she has distributed at public gatherings. She mentioned the example of Boston, where she said visiting LNG ships caused both the harbor and airport to close while they were in the area.

Emmett asked to comment on the question as well, saying that Coos Bay "has a history of receiving tankers with similar cargo, and we've never had a problem before. ... The people I work with just laugh at this."

Unlike past meetings, which have been known to go on well into the night, the forum wrapped up promptly at 9, with those who had additional questions encouraged to approach panelists individually.

Collier said that though Clarke had not been her first choice for moderator, she felt he had performed extremely well in the job, and felt the presentation was balanced.

"Our intent on doing this was to get information out to people fairly," said Collier. "Especially with all the nitpicking going on, we were like, 'Let's all get together and figure this out.'"

The next two forums will be held in the North Bend Community Center on Oct. 18 and the Hales Center for the Performing Arts on Jan. 11. They will be moderated by Tim Novotny, and will feature a slightly different lineup of panelists, including a port representative, Collier said.
