- Spectra is Coming to Town-

 Spectra Energy is coming to town to answer residents’ questions about the compressor station they are proposing to build here. In case you don’t know it yet, Spectra Energy Corp is the S&P 500 company headquartered in Houston, Texas that is the primary mover behind the Access Northeast Pipeline Project that will be affecting our town. Our BOS who are sponsoring the public meeting, have communicated to us that Spectra will be attending as a “courtesy” to the town and it will not be an open forum. The questions will be sent in advance of the meeting (with a submission deadline of 9/17) so Spectra’s answers will be prepared. Because the meeting does not allow for a dialogue with Spectra, the onus will be on the citizens of Rehoboth to inform themselves in advance. To prepare I encourage everyone to go online, (go to YouTube) and take a look at Spectra’s track record which is not without incident. This features US government imposed penalties for numerous environmental, construction and safety violations, accidents and explosions, loss of property and loss of life.

 According to PHMSA, (the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Association) the US Department of Transportation agency responsible for enforcing regulations for safe, reliable, environmentally sound pipeline infrastructure, Spectra’s record is not good. You may recall Spectra’s most recent accident (April 2016) in rural Salem Township, PA- in which a 30” pipe ruptured and blew a 12 foot deep crater, creating a 1500 sq. foot hole, and scorching the earth for ½ mile. The intensity of the heat from the explosion inflicted third degree burns over 75% of James Baker’s body as he ran from his ruined home. After the accident the PHMSA report raised questions about the integrity of Spectra Energy’s pipeline inspections and response plans. Yes, you heard it right. Spectra is supposed to monitor itself- as PHMSA doesn’t have the funding or staff (inspecting only 7% of the US pipeline infrastructure).

 In a recent meeting regarding the Rehoboth compressor station, our BOS advised those attending: “The people of Rehoboth don’t care about what has happened elsewhere, they are only interested in what is happening right here”. Could our collective town vision be so myopic? This defies common sense. If communities and local governments want to know what to expect from Spectra Energy, ask folks who live with its facilities today. Compressor station and pipeline explosions and fires are documented. Listen to the testimonials from families forced to live next door to gas pipelines, metering stations and compressor stations. If air, noise and light pollution aren’t bad enough, our compressor station will bring with it the chance of fire and explosion. Page 65 in our town bylaws reads:

 “ No land or building shall be used or occupied in any district in any manner as to create any dangerous, injurious, noxious or otherwise objectionable fire, explosion, radioactive or other hazard; noise or vibration; smoke, dust, or other form of air pollution; electrical or other disturbance; glare; liquid or solid refuse or wastes; contamination of groundwater or the pollution of streams, condition conducive to the breeding of rodents, or insects; or other substance, condition or element in a manner or in an amount as to affect adversely the surrounding area.”

 So, on Monday the 26th when Spectra Energy comes to town- be prepared. Be prepared for Spectra to talk about their great safety record, and what “good neighbors” they are. They will paint a benign picture of their compressor station and describe it as one small engine on a 12 acre pad, surrounded by a vast wooded “buffer”, and they will liken the noise emanating from it to the sound of “running water”. What they won’t tell you is that of all compressor stations built, 2/3 are subject to build outs. These builds outs can include, but are not limited to additional compressors, power plants, or even larger LNG storage facilities, housing enormous football field sized tanks (such as the one they are proposing in Acushnet). The large amount of land they generally seek as “buffer “serves two purposes- to calm abutters and to serve their future plans as the need arises. Take a look at our neighbors in Burrillville and the towns hosting compressor stations all along the pipeline. Listen to those affected in Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and New York and see what has happened to them. What Spectra says, and what they end up doing have proven to be two very different things.

 If Spectra Energy is allowed to build the compressor station in town, they will not be the self-described “good neighbor” they profess. They will be the neighbor that ignores our town’s zoning and bylaws, the neighbor that threatens our water, ruins our property values, and takes from us the very thing that attracted us to come here in the first place. Trust facts, not promises, and look at their track record. And if Spectra says (as our town and state representatives espouse) there is nothing we can do to fight back, don’t believe it! We may not have a vote, but we have a voice. Grass roots opposition to corporate and Federal pressure has seen victories elsewhere and it can work for us here. There are many examples of communities organizing against these risky compressor stations and dangerous pipelines. We need you to join us to keep Spectra from bringing their compressor station to our town!

 I invite everyone to stop by our booth at the Rehoboth Harvest Festival on September 17th, and to attend Dr. Curtis Nordgaard’s presentation concerning the health effects of living near compressor stations and leaky pipelines which is scheduled for 7PM on September 19th at the DR High School.

 Tracy Manzella

 Citizens Against the Rehoboth Compressor Station

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