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Village urges EPA to dredge basin

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FORT EDWARD — The Village Board moved unanimously Monday to urge the federal Environmental Protection Agency to dredge the Hudson River from the northeastern section of the Fort Edward Yacht Basin to Lock 7.

For decades, silt has accumulated in that section of river — on the east side running almost the entire length of Rogers Island. Village officials contend the buildup is restricting recreational and commercial boats from using the island's side channel, and therefore hurting the local economy.

Dredging the channel would "enhance the navigability and public use of the Hudson River," which "has been designated an American Heritage River, offering critical economic funding to invite new business and jobs to the Fort Edward community," according to a resolution passed by the board at Monday's meeting.

The channel is maintained by the state Canal Corp., but officials from that state agency are expected to defer decisions on any dredging projects to the EPA because of the PCB contamination. The EPA, on the other hand, is balking about becoming involved in an area that's within the Canal Corp.'s authority.

Coincidentally, representatives of General Electric Co. made a presentation to the board to clarify that the company is against any environmental dredging projects in the river.

GE doesn't maintain the channel in question, said company spokesman Mark Behan. Therefore GE will not get involved in the navigational dredging issue.

Navigational dredging pertains to boat travel in and out of the yacht basin. Environmental dredging is centered around whether General Electric should clean up the millions of square yards of PCB-laden silt on the banks and on the bottom of the river.

"We believe the best way to achieve (lower PCB levels in fish) is by letting the river clean itself naturally," said John Haggard, GE's Hudson River project manager, in an oft-repeated company campaign.

Former Fort Edward town Supervisor Terry Seeley tied GE to the navigational dredging project by saying that what was once an inexpensive operation has become an overwhelming expense to the taxpayers.

Some of about 30 people who attended the meeting jumped to defend GE as a major employer in Fort Edward and as a good neighbor that has contributed to several community events and projects.

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Others said that GE was concerned only with making money and not about the welfare of people in the upper Hudson Valley.

"You mentioned that there are 380 (GE) jobs (in Fort Edward)," Seeley said. "Remember. You sent 1,400 of our jobs to Mexico."

Behan said there weren't sufficient customers and that GE saves considerable money in transportation by having jobs nearer to the customers it does have — apparently in proximity to Mexico.

GE's presentation came almost one month after a presentation to the board by representatives of the Poughkeepsie-based environmental group Scenic Hudson. At the Nov. 7 meeting, Marion Trieste, a consultant hired by Scenic Hudson, called for a cleanup of PCBs.

Hundreds of tons of PCBs, or polychlorinated biphenyls, were dumped into the river by GE factories in Hudson Falls and Fort Edward from the mid-1940s until 1977, when the suspected carcinogen was banned by the federal government. The EPA is expected to decide next week whether GE should be required to take some action to remove the PCBs.

In the mid-1970s, the state dredged the Fort Edward Yacht Basin and deposited the PCB-contaminated sediment temporarily on the shore of Rogers Island.

The residue of this dredging, plus recurring flooding, are believed to be among the sources of the PCB pollution on Rogers Island. Concentrations of PCBs along the island's shoreline were as high as 1,800 parts per million, which is a high enough level to be considered a substantial health risk.

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Letter to the Editor

Tuesday, December 5, 2000

Canal Association says remove PCBs

Editor:

After listening to both sides of the dredge arguments, interviewing boaters, and discussing the issue with canal-dependent business people and residents living along the Hudson River, the executive board of the New York Canal Improvement Association has concluded that the PCBs should be removed from the Hudson River at the earliest possible date.

To leave the PCBs in the river will result in continued health threats and economic hardships for the counties surrounding the waterway.

EDWARD TABOR
Executive Officer
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