

Foes Attack N-Site Plan In Lewiston

By JOANN SCELSA

LEWISTON — More than 100 residents jammed the Town Hall Thursday night, crowding the aisles and overflowing into the hallway as the community tried to organize to take on the federal government.

The meeting was sponsored by the "NO LOOW" committee formed in response to a federal plan to turn the former Lake Ontario Ordnance Works into a permanent storage site for nuclear wastes from New York and, possibly, surrounding states.

Steven Nathanson, spokesman for the group, set the tone of the meeting in his opening remarks.

"I'd rather not be here," said Mr. Nathanson, an environmental engineer, "but the fact is we've got to be here because there's a real threat to our community."

He charged the federal Department of Energy with irresponsibility, challenged the "technical soundness" of its proposal and said the only acceptable alternative to local residents is the total decommissioning of the site and its return to unrestricted use.

MR. NATHANSON said he believes technology exists to return the land to productive use, even if that means excavating and removing 50 feet of earth and replacing it with uncontaminated top soil.

Gerda Swensson, one of the residents who headed the successful fight to keep the Hojack rail line from being reactivated, offered that group's support and the benefit of its experience to the fledgling "NO LOOW" group.

Ms. Swensson said that the mood of Thursday night's meeting was very different from the mood of a few years ago, when residents learned the Hojack line might be reactivated and once again dissect the town.

"We're all very somber," Ms. Swensson said. "We are in a state of shock."

She stressed the importance of an organized, fact-based approach

"Get the facts," she advised. "Write to anyone and everyone. Write letters to newspapers. Make it a public issue. Get support groups interested. This is no time for prima donnas or headline-seekers."

"WE'RE ALL in this together. We're all going to die in the same way. Let's at least be organized about it. I want to be able to go out and get a breath of fresh air, not a breath of death air. Is it going to come to pass that we can't drink milk from our cows or eat the food our farmers grow? It has happened in other places," Ms. Swensson said.

Mr. Nathanson said NO LOOW has pledges of support from local groups including the town and village boards, the Lewiston-Porter United Teachers, the Lew-Port Parent-Teachers Association, Operation Clean, Operation Clean Niagara and the Sierra Club, most of which were represented at the meeting.

Nanda Casucci appeared on behalf of Ontario Member of Parliament Al MacBain. Ms. Casucci said Mr. MacBain calls the "idea (of a storage site) absolutely insane" and pledges his full support.

She said Mr. MacBain, who represents Niagara Falls, Ontario and Niagara-on-the-Lake in the Canadian Parliament, has already contacted Canada's minister of the environment.

Margherita Howe, chairman of Operation Clean Niagara, said she also will work to get municipalities, the province of Ontario and the Canadian government to oppose the repository plan.

"WE HAVE to stop it immediately, nip it in the bud," she said. "I am aghast at this ludicrous possibility. We will do all we can."

Mrs. Howe said she is convinced the U.S. government has "written this area off."

Danielle DeGulier, president of Citizens Against Pollution, circulated copies of letters to President Reagan and Department of Energy official Edward G. Delaney. She asked the residents to sign the letters and return them before the end of the meeting and said they would be mailed immediately.

Ms. DeGulier also urged residents to pressure the Niagara County Legislature, the Porter Town Board and the Lewiston-Porter Board of Education to oppose the repository plan.