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RAB expands vision for community

The Restoration Advisory Board for the former Lake Ontario Ordnance Works has expanded its work to better serve local residents. Karen Allen, chair of the Outreach Committee, explained to help assure balanced representation and build public credibility.

Through an intensive work session, hosted by the Environmental Leadership Institute at Niagara University, more than two dozen community and RAB participants identified needs and suggested task and solutions to solve the lingering concerns with the LOOW site in Lewiston-Porter.

"Initially, the RAB was a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers method to communicate with the public, but now it is managed by the community and deals with broader issues

The current LOOW site and surrounding properties of interest still encompass 2,500 acres of the original 7,500 acres that were seized by the government to produce munitions and handle and dispose of radioactive materials, starting in 1942.

"They (the federal government) created the problem, fragmented the responsibility for it, then left town and ignored ongoing monitoring and completing the cleanup," said Bill Choboy, RAB membership chair.

Allen mentioned the need for stronger two-way dialogue with the community, including use of Web sites, surveys, informal information exchanges and meetings to gather input and give status.

According to Choboy and Allen, there is an increase in public awareness, and more people have come forward to join RAB and help on committees, but more transparency and volunteers are needed. The group also identified a need for more transparency and an expanded Steering Committee,

"Some of these areas line up with the existing RAB structure but others don't, and also need more attention," said RAB Chair Sean Kelly.

Kelly explained that, "Because this RAB has a broader mission to help the community, we need to energize all talent, both individually and from the numerous organizations and government agencies." It no longer just deals with a limited geographic area, as does the Army Corps of Engineers. Topics such as the completion of the Lew-Port school testing, started two years ago but never finalized, and the recent discovery of plutonium in uncontained areas, now fall under the broadened scope of the RAB.

Participants wanted an umbrella plan for testing, monitoring and remediation, with independent technical review and public involvement.

Further information is available from RAB Chair Sean Kelly at 286-8092.