

# LOOW RAB session informative

by Terry Duffy

Members of the new Lake Ontario Ordnance Works Restoration Advisory Board met for what could be termed a very constructive session, Tuesday, Dec. 6, at the Lewiston-Porter Community Resource Building alumni room.

The group, one of two in the area formed in past months to shed light on contamination issues related to past government activities at the LOOW site in Lewiston and Porter, over a three-hour period discussed a wide range of environmental concerns. Community interest was strong and included input from elected officials from the Town of Lewiston, the villages of Lewiston and Youngstown, plus representatives from the New York state attorney general's office, Lewiston-Porter School District and Niagara County Health Department. Also participating via telephone was Dr. Ron Scurdato, past contributor to the Health Department's Community LOOW project in 2008.

"This committee should be recognized," commented RAB chair Bill Choboy of the Army Corps' non-recognition of a local RAB at the onset of the session. Corps officials were invited to attend but declined.

However a number of inquiring local residents did attend, and disclosures gleaned from the discussions were enlightening, to say the least.

Highlights included an informative discussion of last week's Army Corps workshop on the Phase IV Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study of the former Town of Lewiston Waste Water Treatment Plant. Also, continuing discussion of the Army Corps' Sept. 28 session on waste disposal options for the Interim Waste Containment Structure at the Niagara Falls Storage Site (See detailed report in Sentinel, Oct. 1, "Army Corps offers new insight ...").

On both projects there were discrepancies found and questions raised by RAB members in response to the Corps' determinations and comments thus far.

On the WWTP, following a detailed PowerPoint presentation submitted by Steering Committee member, chemist Ann Roberts, who was absent, members had questions on the thoroughness of Corps Phase

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IV investigations, questions over cleanups done thus far, groundwater contamination at the site and questions on who might be ultimately responsible for some of its cleanup costs.

One item involved questions by the state Department of Environmental Conservation on Corps' thoroughness in preparing its Phase IV report, presented by RAB member Amy Witryol. "There appears to be alternative views," she said. Witryol furnished a Nov. 29 letter written by DEC senior engineering geologist Kent Johnson, where he presented DEC concerns on the Phase IV Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study to Corps project manager for the WWTP, Michael Senus. In it, Johnson stated the Corps Phase IV report, which was presented at the Lewiston Senior Center last week, was incomplete. "The report does not tie together the previous environmental investigations with the Phase IV RI to provide a comprehensive understanding of the potential threats to this parcel," wrote Johnson. Mentioned were the Corps' non-confirmation of "previous detections of contamination in underground utilities" and its lack of characterization of those contaminations "for a remedial determination to be made. These concerns were raised in department comments on the Phase IV RI work plan, dated July 14, 2009."

However no response by the Corps has yet followed.

Still another WWTP issue discussed that night involved the cleanup cost responsibility for the property, which was transferred to the Town of Lewiston in the 1970s. Member discussions revealed that the town could be liable for at least some of the cleanup expense, even though Lewiston has never actually utilized the site. "The Army

Corps (in some of its communication to the town) did indicate that Lewiston could be responsible," responded Lewiston Councilman Al Bax, a RAB Steering Committee member when discussions arose. Bax said the Corps' determination may have come from town highway department security measures performed at the site in recent years in response to trespassing. "The town merely touched the property and is not responsible," argued Bax, adding that in its entire ownership the town has never utilized any part of it.

Perhaps the most interesting item came in the form of feedback by residents to survey questions posted on the group's website, accessed at [www.loowrab.com](http://www.loowrab.com), on what to do with the radioactive contaminated IWCS, its future and the possibility of residential and recreational uses.

Titled questions, which included options, were: "We want the federal government to?"; "What standard for NFSS should the Army Corps achieve?"; and "When should radioactive waste be safely removed?"

Residents' responses were overwhelming, with just about all arguing for complete cleanup, remediation and closure of the IWCS. Out of 107 responses the majority of them local, 104 wanted complete removal of all the radioactive waste from the IWCS and 102 wanted unrestricted use, recreational and residential, for the property. All wanted it done as soon as possible.

One comment posted that basically spoke for all was, "It's frustrating that these questions even need to be asked. With the Lew-Port schools being so close to this site, the safest cleanup (residential standard) seems like the only reasonable choice as well as just removing all the waste..."

It should be noted the Army Corps, following its Sept. 28 presentation conducted roundtable discussions with attendees and gauged their views on the future of the IWCS. While there was strong sentiment for complete remediation/closure of IWCS as in the RAB survey, with many suggesting a nature preserve for the site, some of the comments contained in an Oct. 4 draft "Summary of Public Input" of attendees from that session did at least prove interesting. Consider the Corps' summary of some of the responses gleaned:

- "There was general agreement that long-term residential and agricultural uses would not likely be supported by the community."

- "At a minimum, participants believe that the community would like the highest risk materials removed and that overall remediation of the site done in consideration of community values and concerns."

- "One stakeholder strongly expressed the idea of industrial revitalization and the good this would do for the economy of the community."

- "Agricultural and residential uses do not make sense."

As RAB discussions wound up on this issue, comments were heard and they were telling, with many questioning the logic of even considering having any part of the IWCS cell remaining. RAB member Dr. R. Nils Olsen, a long time participant, saw no alternative other than complete removal/closure of the IWCS. "No one is going to want to move into an area with a nuclear waste dump," said Olsen.

"... It is a matter of concern if we decide to wait for this," said Olsen, arguing for the Corps to take action. "This is definitely a matter of concern."

He likely spoke for all on hand that night.