

Fear a Montauk ‘Brownfield Site’

By [T.E. McMorrow](#) | April 2, 2015 - 11:47am



A National Grid-owned site on Fort Pond in Montauk may have contaminated soil, the East Hampton Town Zoning Board of Appeals has been told. *T.E. McMorrow*

The future and dangers of former electrical generators and abandoned fuel tanks on Fort Pond on Industrial Road in Montauk were taken up by the East Hampton Town Zoning Board of Appeals Tuesday night.

“This is a potential brownfield site,” Jeremy Samuelson, the executive director of Concerned Citizens of Montauk, warned the board.

The property owner has yet to supply reports on contamination levels, Eric Schantz, a senior planner for the town, told the members.

The site, slightly under one acre, is on the northern shore of the pond. It is owned by National Grid, with an active electrical substation used by PSEG.

National Grid is asking to be allowed to remove everything on the site with the exception of the substation. There are three abandoned diesel generators, two aboveground fuel tanks, three belowground tanks, a concrete slab formerly used for fuel truck unloading, various foundation pads, cradles, and asphalt, along with three

buildings. After this work is done, National Grid wants to regrade the entire site with clean dirt covered with ground quartz. A cellphone tower on the site would not be disturbed.

Because of the site's location on the pond, as well as a wetland area immediately across Industrial Road, a special permit is needed for the work, along with distance variances from the wetlands for a planned fence around the perimeter.

"National Grid wants to move on this immediately. It's a win-win," Laurie Wiltshire of Land Planning Services, representing National Grid, told the board.

The Planning Department over all supports the project, though it wants the area to be revegetated rather than covered with ground quartz.

Despite the department's support, however, Mr. Schantz raised a red flag, telling the board that the town had never received a report from the applicants regarding the level of toxins found in core samples of soil taken in July.

To Mr. Samuelson, however, who told the board he represents 1,200 families, the entire proposal raised a forest of red flags.

"You don't have the information to make a decision," Mr. Samuelson told the board, which declared itself lead agency on the project Tuesday night. He said there may be many toxins in the ground beneath the site, like PCBs and asbestos. He complained of the lack of a set protocol.

He compared the project to the removal of the Hortonsphere in Sag Harbor back in 2009. In that case, he said, a great deal of time and care was taken to get an accurate assessment of the dangers involved before National Grid received permission to proceed with dismantling the big blue gas ball.

The application includes the stipulation that, if there were any toxic spills during the removal process, the State Department of Environmental Conservation would have to be contacted within two hours.

This did not sit well with another opponent to the project, Richard Janis of East Hampton. "There should be a D.E.C. man on the site. The chances this ground is heavily contaminated is a no-brainer," he said.

Mr. Samuelson said that the applicant should make clear what the plans are for the working substation on the western portion of the site.

According to Ms. Wiltshire, there are no formal plans, although it is understood that PSEG would eventually move it to the eastern part of the property, which is at a higher elevation.

The uncertainty of this eventual move is what led to the proposed laying of gravel instead of revegetation, which disturbed several zoning board members, including David Lys. “Without a time frame,” he said, “we could have crushed gravel for 100 years, instead of vegetation.”

Mr. Samuelson complained that what the applicant was doing was segmentation, getting approval for a large project in smaller bites. “They already know that they want to move the [substation] from one side to the other,” he said. “They don’t have a fully realized plan.”

This was disputed by Ms. Wiltshire, who reminded the board that her client was National Grid, not PSEG, adding that she could not speak for PSEG.

“This application is for removal, not to place anything there,” John Whelan, the board’s chairman, told Mr. Samuelson. “That is not what this application is.”

At the end of the public hearing, the board agreed to keep the record open for an undetermined amount of time to allow additional response from the public, as more information, such as the report on any toxic chemicals found in the core samples, becomes available. Ms. Wiltshire promised to get that report to the board within the next few days.

It appeared, in the end, that the application would be heading for a second round of public hearings at the Z.B.A.