

Project 2: Support the Work of Fore River Residents Against the Compressor Station (FRRACS)

Introduction

FRRACS is a grassroots organization of residents of the South Shore of Massachusetts who have come together to oppose the construction of a fracked-gas compressor station in Weymouth, MA. As members of the South Shore node of 350MA, the Green Sanctuary team has engaged with FRACCS in this very specific fight to stop the import of fossil fuels through our area.

This compressor station is at the crux of the global climate crisis. The station is a crucial piece of the Atlantic Bridge Pipeline, a project of Spectra Energy (now Enbridge), to pump fracked gas from the Marcellus shale fields in Pennsylvania, through New England, and on to Nova Scotia for export to Europe. If we can prevent this facility from being built, we may be ensuring that a very significant amount of shale gas stays in the ground.

The compressor station fight is also a question of environmental justice. The plan places a very dangerous industrial facility in a densely-populated, working class Weymouth neighborhood, one already over-burdened with polluting industrial facilities. The fumes from the station would blow directly over the poorest section of neighboring Quincy. The compressor station presents multiple challenges to public health and safety including increased air and noise pollution, risk of explosion (which has happened elsewhere), exposure of toxic materials in the ground during excavation, and interference with an existing conservation area.



Compressor station site directly abutting the Fore River bridge between Weymouth and Quincy

Green Sanctuary's approach to this fight has been to follow the lead of the local residents most impacted. This approach enacts the philosophy of the Social Justice Committee of Old Ship Church: that people directly involved can best identify their own needs, strengths, and appropriate actions. Thus, Green Sanctuary provides support in ways FRRACS requests: by publicizing the issue, letter-writing, lobbying, rallying, and engaging in civil disobedience.

Whose Backyard? Environmental Justice Factors in Opposing the Compressor Station

Green Sanctuary has supported FFRACS since March 20, 2015, when Spectra Energy (now Enbridge) informed residents of plans to build a natural gas compressor station at the Fore River Basin in Weymouth. At a protest rally in September, 2015, Old Ship Green Sanctuary / 350MA member, Laura Burns, emphasized that methane emissions from natural gas are “not a not-in-my-backyard issue” but a global climate change issue.

<https://braintree.wickedlocal.com/article/20150903/NEWS/150908540>

Appeals and Rallies

Throughout 2016-2017, FFRACS pursued regulatory and legislative actions to prevent construction, including filings with the MA Department of Environmental Protection and MA Department of Public Utilities. Green Sanctuary / 350MA members participated in lobbying on Beacon Hill for legislation to limit the building of compressor stations so close to neighborhoods, as is the Weymouth station. Through Health Care Associates for Clean Energy, Turner Bledsoe urged Governor Baker to conduct a health care assessment of the compressor station; he also served on two Town of Hingham advisory groups regarding the compressor station.

Permits Granted Anyway

Nevertheless, most of the permits required for construction to begin were granted over the course of 2017. FFRACS immediately filed for appeals with regard to air quality, pipeline safety, waterways safety, and hazardous materials safety assessment, and also filed several legal suits to halt the project.

Green Sanctuary/ 350 MA members Turner Bledsoe, Laura Burns, and Joan Bledsoe participated as legal “intervenor” in regulatory hearings.



Green Sanctuary / 350 “South Shore Node” members Connie Gorfinkle (holding white sign) and Joan Bledsoe (second from left) at the FFRACS rally on April 26, 2016.



Green Sanctuary/350 Mass members Connie Gorfinkle, in front with sign, and Laura Burns, to her left. Lobbying on Beacon Hill, July 2016

Through its bi-monthly meetings and the participation of members, Green Sanctuary / 350MA “South Shore Node” continued to support FRRACS opposition through rallies, regulatory interventions, and stepping up to sit-ins in Governor Baker’s office in late 2019.

Construction Begins

When in November of 2019 Enbridge was finally granted the Notice to Proceed (NTP) with construction on the compressor station by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, FRACCS and 350 MA stepped up their resistance again.



Construction begins, November 2019

Civil Disobedience

On January 11, 2017, FFRACS had held its first Nonviolent Direct Action training session.

FRRACS held a series of disobedience actions in

December 2019 and January 2020. On December 5, 2019, Green Sanctuary member Laura Burns was one of four FRRACS demonstrators charged with trespassing and disorderly conduct after they refused to stop blocking a construction vehicle at the site.

<https://weymouth.wickedlocal.com/news/20191210/weymouth-compressor-foes-vow-to-continue-civil-disobedience-protests>



FRRACS and allies block a construction vehicle, Dec. 5, 2019, Laura Burns, right

The four were brought to the Weymouth Police Station for booking and transferred to Quincy District Court, where they were placed in leg shackles. They were charged with disorderly conduct and trespassing, but the charges were dropped to a civil infraction pending no arrests for 30 days.

In her piece published that day in the *Hingham Anchor*, Laura explained that she had written letters for years and had put in “over a hundred hours lobbying for climate legislation this summer. But we are at the point in the battle against climate change where none of us can afford to pick and choose what we do. We all must do everything in our power to soften the blow for our children, or they will have little to thank us for.”

<https://hinghamanchor.com/former-selectman-speaks-out-after-getting-arrested/?fbclid=IwAR1DBelU8gHIFJTv7-NTYpVM-lORTjOE9cTyCL9jpGrObkD8MFrrUnMrdsI>



Arrestees released from jail, Dec. 5 2019. Green Sanctuary/350 Mass member Laura Burns, second from right

Excellent media coverage helped make the point that the Enbridge project is bad for the locale but natural gas is bad for the planet.

Interfaith Activism

On February 27, 2020, at Quincy Point Congregational Church near the construction site, faith leaders gathered: Episcopalians Caring for Creation, Jewish Climate Action Network,

UUMassAction, Mass. Environmental Ministries of the United Church of Christ, Southern New England Conference, and Boston Catholic Climate Movement. Speakers re-iterated the environmental objections that had been raised for many months, adding, “We believe that stopping this project is an urgent matter of climate justice for people of faith and for all people of good will.”



Interfaith Gathering, Quincy Point Congregational Church, 2/27/20

Shutting it Down

On February 19th, 2020, we participated in a mass demonstration which stopped construction completely. Hundreds of people from all over the region gathered at the site and 13 people were arrested. Two individuals entered the construction site and locked their bodies to construction equipment. Soon after, workers were forced to turn off their machines and walk off the site.

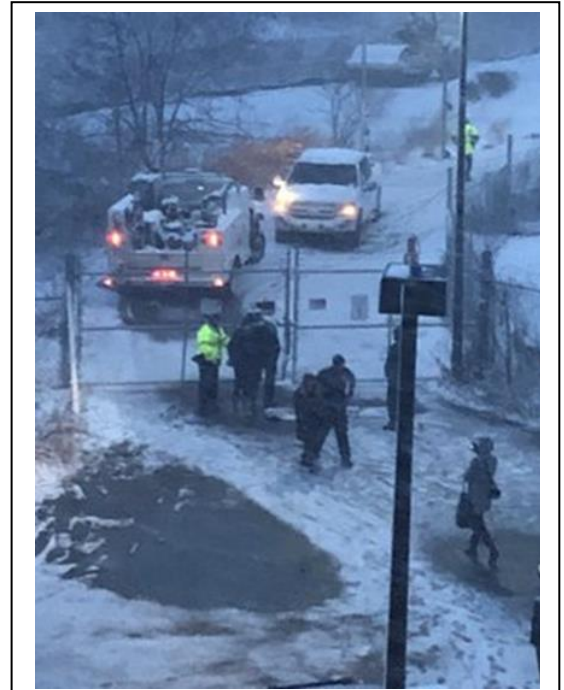
<https://www.patriotledger.com/news/20200219/reduced-charges-for-weymouth-compressor-station-protesters>

Since the first round of arrests for civil disobedience in December 2019, over thirty activists have been arrested.

What can Old Ship's Green Sanctuary do now?

Now, when we cannot safely gather to protest, it is devastating that construction continues, to the peril of the workers and the neighbors. In March, Green Sanctuary / 350MA members participated in a "protest parade" of cars circling the construction site, and then to Weymouth Town Hall. Meanwhile, several lawsuits wend their way through the system, and hold out hope that even if construction is completed, the station might never be allowed to open.

In the Green Sanctuary Re-accreditation Application, Laura Burns wrote, "This project will continue until the proposal to build the compressor has been scuttled. If we are successful, this may take up to three years, based on current conditions." Clearly, the proposal has not been scuttled. We can now do what we have done all along: witness for the neighbors, the workers, and the world, and continue to use letter-writing, lobbying, rallies and civil disobedience to oppose use of natural gas globally, and continue promoting green energy through, for example, supporting a movement for a Green New Deal. There is no reason to stop.



Arrests being made the morning of Feb. 19,2020, when protests shut down the site for the day



Rallying at the site