

## Courts & Commissions

**[9] SCL Should Promote CGS Shutdown, City Council Energy Committee Told • from [1]**

Seattle City Light should use its influence as an Energy Northwest board member to promote the shutdown of the 1,170-MW Columbia Generating Station,

several groups suggested to the City Council Energy Committee this week.

Representatives of Heart of America Northwest, the Northwest Energy Coalition, Physicians for Social Responsibility and the Sierra Club participated in an “Environmental Discussion on the Dangers with Nuclear

Power” and a briefing on CGS—including alternatives to it—during the committee’s Aug. 13 meeting.

The meeting was somewhat unique, Energy Committee Chair Kshama Sawant said in her introduction, “because environmental activists are rarely given a governmental meeting all to themselves in order to discuss what dangers face society,” while “corporations that engage in the pollution and don’t have private incentives to move to renewable energy” participate in many such meetings. Environmentalists are only invited to debates, Sawant added.

The Aug. 13 meeting was anything but a debate. All of the groups supported shutting down the CGS, for public safety, environmental and/or economic reasons.

It was the similarity of CGS’ design to the Fukushima nuclear plants in Japan that first attracted the attention of Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility, Bruce Amundson, the group’s president, told the committee. Other major concerns include recent seismic studies that indicate more potential for ground movement at the Hanford site than calculated when the plant was built, and storage of spent fuel at the site.

Amundson said the basic flaw that CGS shares with Fukushima is its small and narrow containment building, which is vulnerable to a loss of coolant if power and water are shut off due to an earthquake.

The NRC is slowly requiring modifications of GE reactors with undersized containment vessels, he said, and has directed CGS operator Energy Northwest to install hardened vents that would release gases into the atmosphere to avoid hydrogen explosions from a loss-of-coolant event. That work was supposed to be completed by 2015, Amundson said, but ENW now has until 2017 to finish installation.

Since CGS was built in 1984, the U.S. Geological Survey has found a much greater potential for large earthquakes than previously thought, Amundson told the committee. “Longer, deeper faults have been found. One is within 2.3 miles of the plant, while before the closest fault was thought to be five miles away.”

In addition, recent seismic data indicates ground motion from an earthquake could be twice the level that CGS was designed to withstand, he said. That information led to upgrading DOE’s nuclear waste treatment plant—now under construction 10 miles away at Hanford—to withstand peak accelerations of 0.6 g (where 1 g is the acceleration due to gravity) rather than 0.5 g, both well above the 0.25 g CGS design.

“We believe ignoring the clear danger from the USGS data is inexcusable and the plant should be closed,” Amundson said. PSR has formally asked the NRC to shut down the plant.

In the event of “that predictable earthquake, Hanford is unique because of its co-location with other nuclear facilities that are going to fail,” said Gerry Pollet, executive director of Heart of America Northwest.

Not far away are the N-reactor’s old spent-fuel pools, which still contain radioactive sludge. About six miles away is DOE’s Waste Encapsulation and Storage Facility (WESF), a pool that stores almost 2,000 capsules of radioactive cesium and strontium that was removed from high-level waste storage tanks at Hanford. “The levels of

radiation released would be lethal if it loses coolant in a mild earthquake,” Pollet said.

If an earthquake were to occur, “it’s ridiculous to believe we’ll be able to provide water to these facilities and the spent fuel pool at CGS,” Pollet said. “The NRC refused to consider, and Energy Northwest turns a blind eye, to the fact that in a mild earthquake we’ll have other releases that will prevent emergency responders from getting generators there to provide back-up power.”

Pollet also pointed out that the NRC required increasing the seismic stability of the waste treatment facility in light of the studies Amundson referenced. “It’s vital that CGS not operate when it can’t meet the same standards we have for facilities all around it,” he said.

Chuck Johnson, director of Physicians for Social Responsibility’s joint task force on nuclear power, distributed copies of the 2013 McCullough Research report the group commissioned, which claimed the region would save more than \$1.7 billion by closing CGS and replacing its output with market purchases and efficiency (CU No. 1625 [12]). The report also suggested that BPA issue a request for proposals for energy and capacity to see if CGS “can be replaced with long-term options that are less costly, less risky and better fitted to regional needs.”

The groups suggested the City Council direct Seattle City Light to use its position on the board of Energy Northwest to promote issuance of such an RFP.

“We urge Seattle City Light, as a board member of Energy Northwest, to follow up on the McCullough report and ask how can we replace the power from this reactor,” Heart of America’s Pollet said. “There are concrete ways of replacing power and saving \$1.7 billion for ratepayers. Those ways are

not helium or hot air, they are real.”

Sara Patton, executive director of the Northwest Energy Coalition, said studies indicate that renewable power and energy efficiency could be substituted for CGS’ output. “We do have plenty of clean, affordable energy available to meet our needs.”

Representatives of the Sierra Club presented the committee with the club’s resolution advocating closure of CGS and replacing it with energy efficiency and clean renewable energy sources.

“It’s an interesting coincidence that we were going to be talking about this issue, and we are happy to include [your resolution] as part of the discussion,” committee chair Sawant said.

The likelihood of an earthquake-related disaster at CGS “on any given day may be low, but the catastrophe if it did is very high,” Sawant said. “Looking at this from the standpoint of economic logic, why would people subject themselves to even the potential of such a disaster if we had alternatives?”

“I am happy we had this discussion,” Sawant added—but “one is not enough. I am also glad we have some specific proposals regarding what the city should be doing, what Seattle City Light should be recommended to be doing.”

The Energy Committee did not officially take up any proposal, however. And while “everyone agreed that the city council should pass a resolution along the lines of the discussion, they would have to have a written resolution”

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**‘There are concrete ways of replacing power and saving \$1.7 billion for ratepayers.’**

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for a vote, said Ted Virdone, Sawant's legislative aide. "This was a political discussion about the direction we would like to go."

Heart of America Northwest is working on such a proposal, program manager Peggy Maze Johnson told *Clearing Up*. "We are going to be presenting some very specific actions we want them to take."

If the committee entertains such a resolution, Energy Northwest will be invited to participate in the discussion, Virdone said. At that point, "it will be essential for both sides to get a fair hearing" *[Jude Noland]*.