

## Plans for gasoline storage, distribution in Northville spark controversy



Northville residents turned out in force last night to speak out against a proposed expansion of United Riverhead Terminal's facilities on Sound Shore Road. Last night's lengthy public hearing was adjourned to Dec. 16 at 7:05 p.m.

The company, an affiliate of Pennsylvania-based United Refining Company, seeks a special permit from the Riverhead Town Board to expand its existing facilities with the construction of two 19,000-gallon tanks for ethanol storage and allow the distribution of gasoline from the facility. URT proposes to convert two existing tanks, currently used to store heating oil, to gasoline storage. The gasoline will be received from tankers at its off-shore platform and delivered to the terminal via URT's existing pipeline, according to company officials.

The tanks sought to be converted will store 3.6 million gallons of regular gasoline and 2.8 million gallons of premium gasoline, according to an Oct. 17, 2014 report prepared by Schneider Engineering of Ronkonkoma, consultants to URT.

The N.Y. State Department of Environmental Conservation issued URT an air facility permit in June, authorizing the facility to store and dispense gasoline from tanks four and five at the site.

The state DEC has also approved the construction of two 19,500-gallon storage tanks for ethanol, which will be blended with the gasoline at the truck rack, as well as a new 1,500-gallon tank for gasoline additives. A new vapor combustion unit will be installed to control VOC emissions and vapor control modifications will be made to the sections of the truck rack that will dispense gasoline.

The state permit also authorizes the conversion of three oil-fired boilers to natural gas. A National Grid contractor is currently extending an existing natural gas line to the facility from Sound Avenue. State regulators classified the action

as unlisted for purposes of review under the State Environmental Quality Review Act and issued a negative declaration regarding its potential impacts on the environment.

The facility was previously used for gasoline storage and distribution until roughly the year 2000, according to URT general manager Scott Kamm.

“We have had an excellent safety record,” Kamm said.

The need for a gasoline distribution point on the East End was highlighted by the impacts of Hurricane Sandy in October 2012, he said.

“The terminal had received several requests from government and emergency response officials during and after the storm asking us to supply them with gasoline,” Kamm told RiverheadLOCAL last month. “United Riverhead Terminal was the only terminal unaffected by the storm, while New York Harbor was shut down.”

The Northville facility was built in 1955, prior to the adoption of a zoning code by the Town of Riverhead, and operates as a pre-existing non-conforming use in an area now zoned for and developed with residential uses. (Many of the homes in the surrounding community were built prior to the development of the terminal by Northville Industries.)

Some of the 20 storage tanks at the 286-acre waterfront site date back to the 1950s; additional tanks and the offshore platform date back to the 1960s. The platform is located 30 miles from the Atlantic Ocean and one mile offshore in the deepest channel on the east coast, according to United Riverhead Terminal. The platform “enables large ships to come from the Atlantic from all points of the globe, thereby avoiding the Port of New York/New Jersey” 80 miles to the west, according to URT.

### **Traffic impacts discussed**

Additional tanker truck traffic is a key concern for residents and the town board in considering the expansion request. The gasoline distribution will result in 12 additional outbound trips daily by tanker trucks operated by the company, according to URT representatives.

Schneider Engineering presented an analysis of five area intersections at the request of Riverhead planning director Rick Hanley: site entry on Sound Shore Road; Sound Avenue and Penny’s Road; Sound Avenue and Northville Turnpike; Sound Avenue and County Road 105; and Sound Avenue and Edwards Avenue. The firm looked at how a 53-foot tanker truck would navigate turns at those intersections, said engineer Sarah Oral.

In both the report and in her presentation last night Oral used diagrams showing the path of a 53-foot tanker truck — the “largest possible truck” to be accessing the site, she said — and its ability to safely navigate the turns required at each intersection.

Oral’s conclusion there are no traffic safety issues at the intersection of Northville Turnpike and Sound Avenue — “a beautiful turn, everything stays where it’s supposed to,” she said, referring to the entire length of the tractor-trailer during the turning maneuver — drew groans and grumbles from the audience.

The engineer identified the intersection of Penny’s Road and



United Riverhead Terminal tank farm in Northville.



(Stock photo: 123rf.com)

Sound Avenue as a safety problem, because “the angle of the intersection is quite acute.” Tankers leaving the facility for points west — the majority of tractor-trailers filling up at the facility, according to her written report — would be required to make an unsafe turn in order to proceed west on Sound Avenue. Southbound tractor-trailers on Penny’s Road would have to enter the northbound lane of travel in order to turn right onto Sound Avenue, according to the report. The trucks would also have to enter the eastbound lane of Sound Avenue in order to proceed west on that narrow, two-lane artery.

Oral suggested that westward-bound tractor trailers instead turn left (east) onto Sound Avenue and then head south on West Lane to Route 25, where they would turn right and head west “to their final destinations.”

“The truck could easily make the left turn,” Oral said, drawing laughter and heckling from the audience.

“Another possibility,” she added, “is installing a sensed signal at the Penny’s Road intersection, which would be flashing red on Penny’s and flashing yellow on Sound except when activated.” The truck driver would be equipped with a sensor to activate the signal, changing the flashing yellow on Sound Avenue to a solid red stop light.

“Then the truck could make its turn,” Oral said.

She did not address the question of what the truck would do if a vehicle is stopped by the signal in the eastbound lane of Sound Avenue, which she said the tractor-trailer needs to use in order to navigate the right turn onto westbound Sound Avenue.

“Another option would be an agreement with the owner of the property on the northwest corner of the intersection to allow the corner to be run over by the back of the tractor-trailer,” Oral said, drawing more laughter from the audience.

She identified safety problems at the intersection of Edwards and Sound, because the angle of the intersection requires a tractor-trailer to enter the westbound lane of Sound Avenue in order to turn east, but said the trucks traveling to and from the Northville facility would not use Edwards Avenue to head south.

“I’m going to start with you’re not going down West Avenue — or West Lane,” Supervisor Sean Walter said. “The signalization of Penny’s and Sound is probably an excellent idea, he said.

“There’s no way in the world you’re not coming up Edwards Avenue — zero chance,” Walter said. The town does not want the tractor-trailers using Main Road and the truck drivers don’t want to drive on Route 58 either, he said.

The supervisor said the company would be required to contribute to improvements at the Edwards Avenue intersection, which he called “a mess.”

“We can’t have tanker trucks making a left-hand turn into oncoming traffic,” Walter said. He said the improvements are going to require condemnation to widen the northbound lane of Edwards Avenue.

Councilman James Wooten said he disagrees. “I do not want to encourage that kind of truck traffic to use Sound Avenue,” he said. “I wouldn’t make it easy for them, that’s for sure.”

Trucks heading to and from the North Fork and the Orient Point ferry use Sound Avenue, Councilman John Dunleavy said. “They do that all the time.”

“You’re fixing Penny’s Lane. You have no choice,” Walter said.

“The traffic light is the best idea you had,” Dunleavy added, “but there has to be a trip so regular cars can use that light to get out of Penny’s Road, too.”

URT general manager Kamm said, “Trucks have been making right turns from Penny’s Lane since the 70s without problems.

In response to a question from Councilwoman Jodi Giglio, Kamm was not able to provide information on the number and types of trucks currently traveling to and from the facility. He said he would submit that information to the board in the coming days.

Residents lined up at the podium to express concern about and opposition to the proposed expansion.

### **Attorney, environmental advocate and residents question review process**

An attorney hired by Northville Beach Civic Association questioned the adequacy of the town's review of the application under the State Environmental Quality Review Act. John Armentano of the law firm of Farrell Fritz in Hauppauge questioned why the town allowed the applicant to complete a short-form environmental assessment form rather than the more detailed long-form EAF, so that it could elicit more information about traffic and other possible impacts from the expansion. Armentano asked the board to continue the hearing to a later date to allow the community more time to analyze the proposal as well as the traffic impact report submitted by the applicant.

Jen Hartnagel, of Group for the East End questioned the SEQRA process and, referring to town board resolution 684, unanimously adopted Oct. 7, asked the board if it had already issued a negative declaration for the project. Under SEQRA, a negative declaration finds that a proposal will not have significant environmental impacts and dispenses with the need to prepare an environmental impact statement. A positive declaration means the project may have significant environmental impacts and an environmental impact statement must be prepared.

In response to Hartnagel's question, the supervisor said no negative declaration had been issued.

"No. That wouldn't be done at this stage," Walter answered. "We haven't made that determination yet. We're gathering the information now."

Resolution 684 states "that the Riverhead Town Board hereby declares itself to be the lead agency for the special permit application of United Riverhead Terminal New York which it classifies as an Unlisted action for the purposes of SEQR compliance and further declares the action to be without significant impact on the natural or social environmental and that an Environmental Impact Statement need not be prepared.."

"If it hasn't been done, that's great, because we would ask that an environmental impact statement be prepared. Clearly there are a lot of impacts to the community," Hartnagel said. She also said the re-introduction of gasoline distribution there, after more than 14 years, should be considered a new use, not an expansion of a pre-existing non-conforming use."

### **Not our 'manifest destiny' to be the county's gas station**

Northville residents expressed concerns about the volume and kind of truck traffic that will result from the proposed expansion — as well as the possibility of future expansion.

John Cullen, former Northville Beach Civic Association president, said the trucks filling up with heating oil are "small neighborhood home delivery trucks" not the 18-wheelers that will be filling up with gasoline for delivery to gas stations.

"The terminal is open 24/7," Cullen said. "Will gas trucks be coming in and out at all hours of the night?"

Cullen also questioned how the gasoline tanker traffic might expand over time. With the decline in home heating oil sales, will more of the tanks at Northville be converted to gasoline storage in the future, resulting in an increased gasoline distribution business there — and increased tanker truck traffic, he asked.

Eve Kaplan of Northville said when the Northville Industries facility was first built "Riverhead was viewed the future armpit of NYC. There was going to be a nuclear plant here, there was sand mining here on a very large scale and there was a tank facility put in." She said residents did not allow development to go in that direction "and now we live

in a nice town, a rural and residential town, not an industrial town.”

Kaplan, a former employee of the North Fork Environmental Council and current owner of the Garden of Eve organic farm in Northville, faulted the traffic report presented by the applicant’s engineering firm as incomplete.

“What was presented here today was not a traffic study,” Kaplan said. “A traffic study would talk about the baseline traffic during the day, at different hours and on different days of the week.

“What is the calculation of 12 trucks per day based on?” Kaplan asked. “How might that increase? As was just acknowledged, they’re not running at capacity there. Demand for fuel oil storage is down and they’re looking for additional revenue sources,” she said.

“Just remember it’s no one’s manifest destiny to be the gas station for Suffolk County.”

### **Civic president questions town ‘fast-tracking’ application**

Northville Beach Civic Association president Neil Krupnick criticized the answers provided by URT in its short-form environmental assessment form.

He read a question from the EAF: “Does any portion of the site of the proposed action or lands adjoining the proposed action contain wetlands or other water bodies regulated by a federal, state or local agency? Guess what they checked? They checked no,” Krupnick said. With the site encompassing waterfront land and an offshore platform on the L.I. Sound, a federally designated estuary of national significance, how could they answer “no” to that question, Krupnick asked.

The civic president also worried that the town was “fast-tracking the application.”

“I don’t think we’re asking for much,” Krupnick said. “We just want to keep our community safe and clean.”

After consulting with the town attorney in a brief executive session to obtain counsel on proper procedure, the board adjourned the meeting to Dec. 16, an evening meeting at which the continued URT hearing would be the first order of business.

The board will also discuss the application further in upcoming work session meetings, Walter promised.