

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

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Fresh air for Bondi's

Sometimes you notice it while driving on I-91. Or walking in downtown Springfield. Or even through an open window in the summertime. We have all smelled the odor that emanates from the Springfield Wastewater Treatment Plant, Bondi's Island. Isn't it time to do something about it?

I have spent the past few months discussing that question with bureaucrats, business people and politicians. In a letter to Mayor Markel, I wrote of those experiences:

"In discussing the odor problem with people from different parts of the Greater Springfield area, I have encountered a broad agreement that the odors must be eliminated. I have also found a willingness to work toward that goal. A citizen's committee working to eliminate odors will strengthen the ability of the city to address the issue. Participation that extends regionally beyond the city limits will strengthen the claim for financial support from the state and federal governments. I ask you to appoint a committee chaired by Sr. Mary Caritas and constituted of members drawn from different parts of the region for this purpose."

I can report today that the task force is appointed. It has met, and is tackling the issues. It differs from previous attempts to deal with the odors in that members will assess the hundreds of pages of multiple studies of the problems and, once those studies are accepted, deal with costs and funding sources for solutions. Members offer expertise in engineering, finance and government and share the conviction that we can make a difference. Several people have called me to offer suggestions for the task force, and I welcome your calls on the subject.

Bondi's Island sewage treatment plant was built to solve the problem of polluted water entering me Connecticut River, and it has solved that problem. That is the good news. The bad news is that the plant now discharges odors into the air, damaging the quality of life and inhibiting the economic growth throughout the region. Every participant who is working with me on abating those odors realizes the importance of our efforts to the entire region.

My commitment to the issue was reinforced after I watched a recent television report. One of the local stations polls its viewers each night on a public issue during the late news broadcast. The poll a few months ago asked the public if the odors at Bondi's Island could be removed. The majority of the callers said, "No, the odors are here to stay." Scientists have told me that is not the case. It is the job of the task force to change that public perception and to lead the way to fresh air in the Pioneer Valley.