

35 ADIN STREET
HOPEDALE, MASSACHUSETTS 01747

February 18, 202

James J. Morin, Commissioner
Edward J. Burt, Commissioner
Adam Anderson, Commissioner
Hopedale Water and Sewer Commission
78 Hopedale Street
Hopedale, Massachusetts 01747

Dear Gentlemen:

I am writing to express great concern regarding the recent hauling of nuclear contaminated materials into Hopedale -- a community that up to this point has been free of such contaminants. The introduction of these contaminated materials into our community is most distressing for a number of reasons.

First, there is absolutely no local oversight of the railroad that carries the grave responsibility of transporting this material. All that is required is notification to the police and fire departments that the contaminated material will be arriving. As you may, or may not be aware, the railroad has never obtained any local permits for any aspect of its operation. At a bare minimum, expanding and paving parking areas requires site plan review so that residents and town officials have the opportunity to voice concerns. Residents and town officials have been deprived of that opportunity because some Hopedale officials have ignored their obligation to enforce town bylaws. This inattention by town officials now has serious consequences because trucks that are hauling nuclear materials are now driving into these parking areas that have never been approved by an independent building commissioner or other government authority. These parking areas are adjacent to residences, an elderly housing complex, low income housing, and within close proximity to our schools.

Second, it is astonishing that the railroad operates within our groundwater protection district. Whatever happens on that railroad property eventually makes its way into the groundwater below. Groundwater is actually a misnomer. That is our drinking water. Are railroads allowed to operate railyards over reservoirs or in close proximity to reservoirs? If so, are they unregulated by local officials? Commonsense tells us that the presence of nuclear materials on this property certainly increases the risk of contaminating groundwater.

What I find most fascinating is that the very reason these materials are being removed from Concord is that the materials contaminated the groundwater there. Is the groundwater in Hopedale less important than the groundwater in Concord? Before the hauling began, I expressed concerns to the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and was assured that this material is not "hazardous" according to regulations. Does it really matter whether the classification is "hazardous" or "contaminated"? Clearly there is a risk of harm, or the material would not be removed from Concord in the first place. Does the material magically lose its "contaminated" classification when it leaves Concord and heads to Hopedale through multiple towns? I was also assured that the material would be loaded and moved out of Hopedale the same day. That assurance has turned out to be false. It is my understanding that the material may remain in the railcars in Hopedale for an unlimited duration.

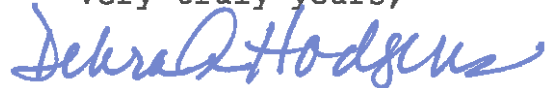
Third, the hauling of nuclear materials into Hopedale strikes me as a completely unnecessary risk for our community. This is the peculiar, circuitous route of the contaminated material: (1) loaded into dump trucks in Concord; (2) hauled 50 miles by truck along various roads to Hopedale; (3) unloaded from trucks in Hopedale and dumped into railcars; (4) hauled 9 miles by rail to North Grafton; (5) transferred to another railroad in Worcester; (6) hauled by rail to Romulus, Michigan; (7) unloaded from train onto dump trucks; and (8) hauled by dump trucks to Belleville, Michigan for burial in one of only two approved landfills in the country (attesting to the danger of the material). So, instead of taking the contaminated material directly from Concord to Worcester, the material takes an odd 59-mile detour to allow for unloading in Hopedale and a brief, 9-mile scenic ride on a short-line railroad. That itinerary (best seen on a map) would be laughable if not so serious.

When I spoke with DEP and EPA, I learned a valuable lesson. Neither of these organizations are interested in Hopedale. EPA was most interested in who else knew about the hauling plan, as if it were some secret. EPA actually wanted names. Please be aware that neither DEP nor EPA will swing into action unless a disaster strikes. It is ENTIRELY up to local officials to safeguard the drinking water in Hopedale. I will repeat this. It is ENTIRELY up to local officials to safeguard the drinking water in Hopedale. No one will do it for us. The groundwater protection district is meaningless unless it is enforced by local officials. To be fair, I have also had several conversations with Dana Hansen from Representative Auchincloss' office. She has been very responsive and indicated that she would look into this matter.

In light of the recent environmental disasters in Ohio and Michigan, I believe we need to take a closer look at protecting our environment. Maintaining a laissez faire policy or waiting for disaster to strike is not a wise approach. The Water and Sewer Commission has a strong record of protecting our environment. That record includes creating the groundwater protection district at a time when the railroad was defunct. I know that you often lack the support of other local officials and even face opposition for trying to protect our water supply. I ask you to keep in mind that your effort is worth the struggle -- we will not have a viable town in the future if we cannot protect our limited drinking water supply.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Very truly yours,



Debra A. Hodgins