

Common sense rears its head in Russell

Could it be that common sense is finally raising its head in Russell? Last week's report that more than 50 residents have signed the RussellFIRST! petition supporting plans to build a 50 megawatt power plant shows that there are people, in town who don't want to be stampeded into blocking a facility that will provide jobs and millions of dollars in taxes.

OUR VIEW

Russell Biomass LLC wants to build the \$165 million plant on the site of the former Westfield River Paper Mill. Slated for construction in the summer of 2010, the facility is one of three planned in the region in response to state efforts to boost renewable energy supplies. It would burn wood construction waste to generate electricity that would be sold to utilities. Opposition has been fierce, noisy and heated.

Some residents say the plant will generate excessive truck traffic and pollution that will ruin Russell's small town atmosphere. Opponents argue that the plant won't benefit the environment or the state's energy supplies.

When plant developers offered in April 'to build a \$5 million by-pass road to the site to keep trucks off Main Street, they were met with jeers from about 30 residents who called the offer "blood money" and said the company acted like a bully.

The petitioners disagree, - and so do we. Russell Biomass won't ruin the town - it will strengthen it.

"We have over 50 signatures and we are going, to get more," said Ann F. Merritt, member of Russell FIRST! that was formed "to make public the broad-based, but silent voice of those who support (the project) and the environmental and financial benefits it will bring to town.

It's not lost on us that the power plant would be built on the site of an old paper mill. Here in Western Massachusetts, we know what that means: It's a building that employs no one, contributes nothing to the tax base and will eventually become a public nuisance that will cost tax' money to demolish.

We urge residents to listen to the RussellFIRST! petitioners. Work out compromises, but get the plant built. Creating jobs and building a tax base is good for the entire community.

Without them, Russell might just be left with only shuttered paper mills and the ornery wild turkeys that roam its woods.