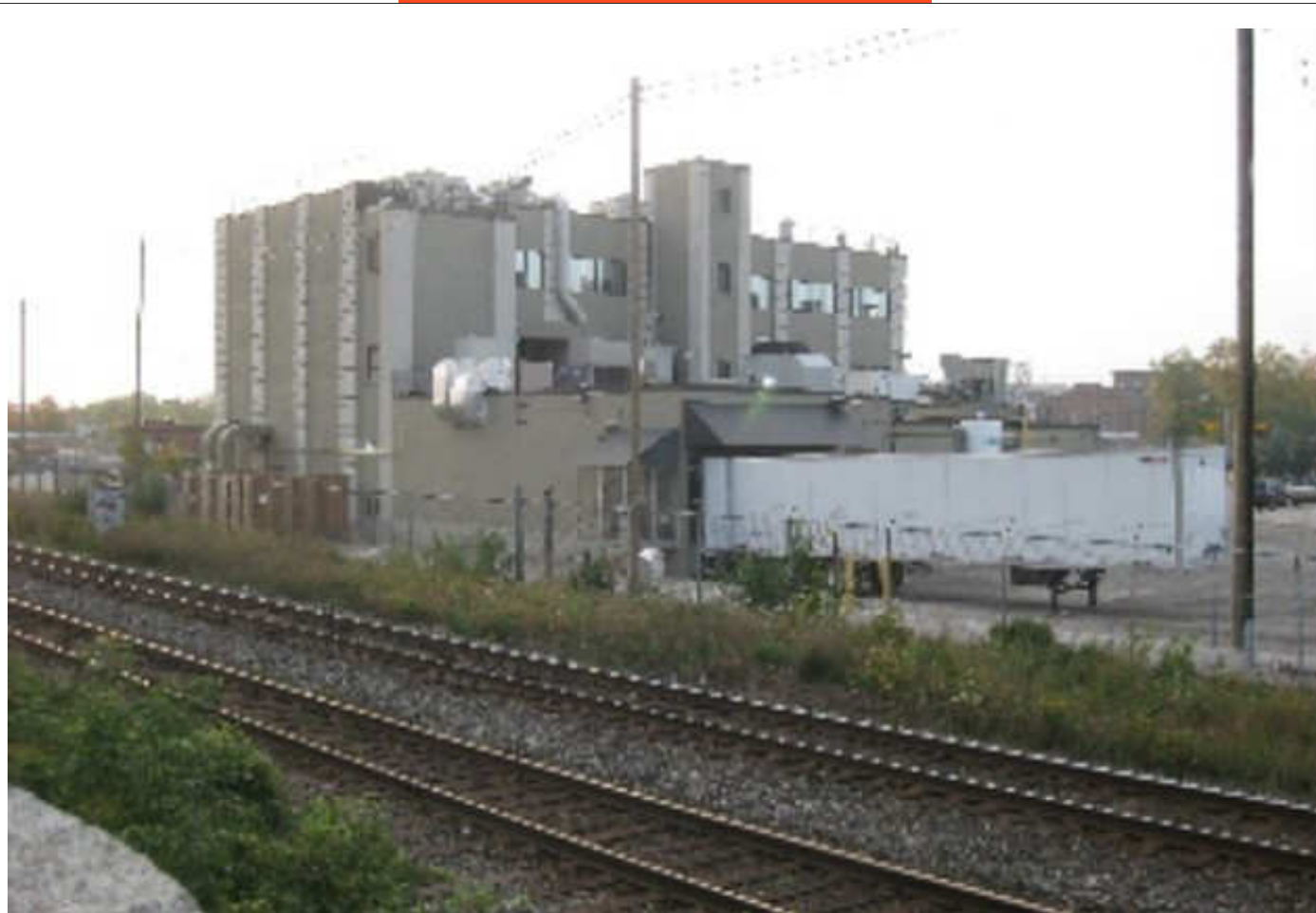


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MUSIC FOOD CLASSIFIEDS ART BOOKS GUIDES NEWS**NEWS****Community revs for fight against uranium plant**
BY SAUL CHERNOS

Several hundred people showed up to two neighbourhood meetings held this week in the wake of [revelations that the GE-Hitachi plant at 1025 Lansdowne processes uranium into fuel for Canadian nuclear reactors](#).

It was standing-room-only as residents, concerned about everything from their personal health and safety to the area's community vibe, peppered politicians, GE-Hitachi officials and environmentalists with questions.

Davenport MP Andrew Cash attended both sessions, held Wednesday by the Dupont Improvement Group and Thursday by local activists working with neighbours, and said he was surprised and shocked by the news. "We're a community that historically doesn't get consulted," he said on Wednesday. "After 50 years we have the right to be ticked off."

At each session, Davenport MPP Jonah Schein asked how many people in the room knew GE-Hitachi processed uranium at the site. Of the hundreds in attendance, less than 20 hands went up in total. "I learned about it from the newspaper a few weeks ago," Schein offered.

At the Thursday meeting at the Davenport Perth Community Centre local councillor Cesar Palacio said the federal government, not the city, regulates the nuclear industry. But he added that the city has played a role in cleaning up PCBs and other chemical contamination left over after other non-nuclear GE factories in the area closed down. "It's not fair for the community to be stigmatized," he said, adding that he intends to present a notice of motion to City Council reflecting neighbourhood concerns.

Cheri DiNovo, MPP for neighbouring Parkdale-High Park, was particularly emphatic, stating that “no level of nuclear radiation is safe – period...have a rousing meeting and shut it down!”

The Wednesday event at the Bloor Gladstone Library was decidedly balanced, with two GE-Hitachi reps, all three levels of government, and Zach Ruitter, who opposed GE-Hitachi’s sister operation in Peterborough and has since moved to Toronto.

Ruitter and Paul Desiri, health and safety manager for GE-Hitachi’s dually-licenced facilities, squared off over science and safety issues, with a tone that was decidedly civil. Desiri said GE-Hitachi met all regulatory requirements for public consultation, but conceded this clearly wasn’t enough and “it’s obvious we need to do some work.”

One resident said he and his neighbours did extensive research about the neighbourhood before buying into the area, yet never found out. He blamed the regulator, the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, in part, and suggested that GE-Hitachi’s recent ten-year licence renewal should not be valid.

Another resident said he’s “not 100 per cent certain the stuff at the plant’s going to harm me” but called for an information process where people in the community know “every step of the way” what is happening.

A third resident took Ruitter to task for bringing an “anti-nuclear” agenda into the otherwise “eclectic” neighbourhood.

Thursday was clearly geared to organizing opposition to the plant and to nuclear issues in general.

Simon Paul Dene of northern Saskatchewan described the dozen or so uranium mines there and told how he lost a sister and brother to cancer, and how his Dene community is facing a nuclear waste dump, despite risks to underground springs.

Roy Brady of Safe and Green Energy in Peterborough said neighbours there found out about GE-Hitachi’s regulatory application with very little lead time to the hearings, and described the fight there that led to the company withdrawing plans to process low-enriched uranium from North Carolina.

Heather Marshall, toxics campaigner with the Toronto Environmental Alliance, commended the crowd for showing up in such huge numbers. “You’re doing what so many other communities across the City of Toronto should be doing,” Marshall said. “Exercising your community right to know.”

Marshall added that uranium is a contaminant not recognized by the Toronto Board of Health’s ChemTRAC list of local pollutants, an initiative under the right-to-know bylaw. “The medical officer of health has the power to undertake studies and enact bylaws if they can prove there’s a health concern in the city.”

Too many speakers, though, and not enough attention to the audience on Thursday. The crowd expressed angst and frustration, interrupting to mention things they’ve noticed, themselves, over the years, even while not knowing what exactly went on at 1025 Lansdowne. One person mentioned a brief evacuation after fire appeared atop a stack in 1999. Another related the apparent buckling of a storage building wall a few years ago.

Palpable anger in the air soon became evident. “Do we have an option to shut it down,” one woman asked. “That’s what people want to know.”

It was as if a bubble had burst. As the meeting wound down, the organizers and a few of the hardiest souls walked to the plant a few blocks away. As a dozen or so police officers watched, backed up by a mobile command vehicle, the small group held a brief vigil and posed with signs and a large yellow banner bearing their message: “Nuclear Power? No Thanks.”

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