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Patrick Administration Approves Efficient, Gas-Fired Power Plant to Replace Salem Harbor Station

Plant would be the first large gas-fired plant built in Massachusetts in more than a decade

BOSTON – Thursday, October 10, 2013 – Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) Secretary Rick Sullivan today announced the Energy Facilities Siting Board (EFSB) has approved the petition of Footprint Power to construct a new 692-megawatt gas-fired power plant at the site of the existing Salem Harbor Station. The new plant is expected to be built and operational by June 2016.

The Footprint project will include the demolition and removal of the existing power plant, which will be retired by June 2014, and the remediation of the site for the new plant and other uses.

“The Footprint facility is expected to be one of the most efficient and lowest-emitting large gas-fired power plants in New England,” said Secretary Sullivan, who chairs the EFSB. “Limiting greenhouse gas emissions while ensuring electricity reliability for the region are critical to the Commonwealth’s long-term environmental and economic objectives.”

The Footprint facility will be the first large gas-fired plant built in Massachusetts in over a decade and will provide New England with a source of power that can go online within ten minutes. Footprint will feature technologies that reduce environmental impacts, including an efficient gas turbine, advanced emission controls, and air cooling rather than water cooling, which uses millions of gallons of water per day from Salem Harbor. The plan also includes a design to reduce visual and noise impacts in the surrounding community.

Studies reviewed by the EFSB indicate that Footprint’s efficient, low-emission technology will reduce the New England grid’s reliance on higher-emitting fossil plants, thereby reducing regional carbon dioxide emissions by about 450,000 tons per year. This reduction is equivalent to more than 103,000 cars taken off the road. The low-emission technology will also cut other harmful air pollutants such as nitrogen oxides, sulfur dioxide and mercury.

“Today’s announcement is another important step forward in the transformation of Salem’s power plant site,” said Senator Joan Lovely. “This is a careful process, and I plan on continuing to work with both city and plant officials as this critical project moves ahead.”

“This approval sets in motion one of the city’s most important redevelopment projects in recent history,” said Salem Representative John Keenan, Chairman of the Telecommunications, Utilities and Energy Committee. “The project will serve to benefit not only Salem’s taxpayers, but our environment as well. It will ensure that the retired coal plant is torn down, the site is cleaned up, and guarantees that the city will not be blighted with an idled, padlocked, and abandoned power plant for years, if not decades to come.”

"This is a major and positive step toward the completion of this extremely important project," said Salem Mayor Kim Driscoll. "Not only will this new natural gas facility significantly reduce carbon dioxide emissions for the area, but it is also the cornerstone of redeveloping our deep water port and Salem Harbor into a 21st century economic engine. With EFSB's approval, Footprint can move forward with their plans to remediate one of Salem's largest brownfield sites into a clean, modern facility. Salem is ready for Footprint and, with this decision, it is clear that the Commonwealth is, as well."

Site preparation is expected to begin in early 2014. During construction, Footprint will employ up to 600 workers at peak periods. Given the densely populated and historic area near the plant, the EFSB decision is imposing a number of protective measures to reduce the impacts on the surrounding community during both construction and operation of the plant. These include strict noise limits, stringent emission controls on diesel construction equipment, visual mitigation measures such as shrubs and trees for residents, and development of a traffic mitigation system in coordination with the City of Salem and other entities.

The EFSB is a nine-member board, chaired by EEA Secretary Rick Sullivan, which includes Commissioners from the Departments of Public Utilities, Environmental Protection, and Energy Resources, the Secretary of the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development, and three public members. The EFSB has primary jurisdiction over the siting of large energy infrastructure projects, including power plants (over 100 megawatts), high voltage transmission lines, intrastate gas pipelines and large natural gas storage facilities.