
SoPo Clear Skies Ordinance reaffirms the power of grassroots organizing | Beacon

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SoPo Clear Skies Ordinance reaffirms the power of grassroots organizing

[Mary-Jane Ferrier](#)



The news was very, very good Aug. 24 when Judge Woodcock of the federal district court ruled that South Portland's Clear Skies Ordinance would stand. It has been a long hard wait, filled with ups and downs, doubts and renewed hope. But the city and the citizens stood firm in the conviction that they have the right to protect themselves from projects that will pollute their environment. Although it took a lot of patience waiting, we owe Judge Woodcock a vote of gratitude for his careful review of all the facts that convinced him to render this judgment.

Protect South Portland is a grassroots organization that formed in early 2013 when it became known that Portland Pipeline had been planning to change from an importing to an exporting pipeline by reversing the flow of its line to bring tar sands oil to load it on tankers in our harbor. I had been involved previously with the citizen effort to keep Irving from building a tank farm on waterfront property near the Shell terminal in Ferry Village and had also worked with Concerned Citizens of South Portland to

get the city to acquire the land which is now Bug Light Park. It was a no-brainer for me to become one of the founding members of this group.

We worked hard to organize citizen resistance to the Pipeline's plans: door to door canvassing, letter writing, phone calling, lobbying of our city council, articles in local papers, demonstrations and presence at every city council meeting or workshop for well over a year. We had a David and Goliath fight on our hands, but put all our trust in the power of people working together to protect their city. Initially, we suffered a close defeat at the polls when the Waterfront Protection Ordinance was defeated by 193 votes in the 2013 November election.

But that defeat only reinforced our dedication to keep this grassroots effort going. The reward for the determination of our citizens to keep going until successful was the passage of the Clear Skies Ordinance by the South Portland City Council with a vote of 6-1 in mid-summer 2014.

In February 2015 the Pipeline sued the City and the case has been in Federal Court since then until Judge Woodcock ruled that the Clear Skies Ordinance can stand.

There are so many people who contributed to the work that led to the passage of the Clear Skies Ordinance. First and foremost, all of us who live in South Portland should be proud of the way we turned out in droves week after week to attend city council meetings and workshops, extending the citizen comment sections of these meetings well into the night, over and over again.

We should be grateful for all the people from other parts of the state, and sometimes from far away, who came to join us in this fight, who walked our streets with us knocking on doors, talking to our neighbors and urging their support.

We also owe a big debt of gratitude to the three people who came forward to serve on the Draft Ordinance Committee, meeting weekly for over six months: David Critchfield, Russell Pierce and Michael Conathan. Under the facilitation of Jeff Edelstein, they met with and listened to anyone who wanted to come forward to comment on their work or to present an opposing view.

It was one of the most transparent civic actions possible, and with it they came up with the simplest and most straightforward of ordinances. Last week's judgment is the proof of that.

The people who coordinate Protect South Portland's activities are a small group. At the core of our effort has been the conviction that when people come together to achieve a goal, there is almost nothing that can stop them. Although we may have provided a little leaven in this process, the real power lies with the hundreds of people who came forward to contribute whatever skills, time and effort they could afford.

Among those without whom this people powerhouse could not have succeeded were NRCM, Toxics Action, Environment Maine, 350 Maine, The Vermont Law School Environmental Clinic, the Conservation Law Foundation of Maine and, of course, the city council of South Portland.

Let us all rejoice together.

(Photo: Supporters of South Portland's Clear Skies Ordinance demonstrate on the Casco Bay Bridge in 2013 | Dan P. Wood.)

Sent from my iPhone
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