

A community activist contrasts confrontational Superconducting Super Collider days with the new Fermilab public participation effort.

war & peace

Public participation is a critical issue for planners of the proposed International Linear Collider. The recent Snowmass conference included a daylong session titled, "Workshop on Public Participation in the ILC," sponsored by the US Linear Collider Communication Committee. Consultant Doug Sarno, of The Perspectives Group in Alexandria, Virginia, stressed the importance of public participation in making better and more lasting decisions: "Powerful decisions resolve issues to the mutual satisfaction and benefit of all involved parties, and result in ownership of the solution among stakeholders." Public participation is a process, not a result; the process must include as many different voices as possible, especially critical voices, to achieve the goal of building relationships. Does the process work? Craig Jones, a member of the Fermilab Community Task Force on Public Participation, reflected on the process of drafting policy recommendations for lab management during nearly eight months of meetings in 2004. Jones was a vocal opponent of locating the Superconducting Super Collider at Fermilab when that issue was debated in the 1980s; his description of the Community Task Force experience is quite different from his memories of the confrontations of 20 years ago.

-Mike Perricone



C.A.T.C.H. - ILLINOIS
(CITIZENS AGAINST THE COLLIDER - HERE)

THIS IS WHAT FERMILAB USED TO LOOK LIKE WHEN IT WAS A "GOOD NEIGHBOR." THAT IS, BEFORE IT WAS PROPOSED TO BECOME THE "INJECTOR" FOR THE 53-MILE SSC RING. NOW FERMILAB IS SAYING, ALONG WITH THE STATE AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENT ...

"I WANT YOUR LAND, WATER, WELLS, HOMES, FARMS, BUSINESSES, JOBS, TAX BASE, TAX DOLLARS, WETLANDS, AND YOUR PEACE AND TRANQUILITY. I WANT IT ALL AND I WANT IT NOW, AND IF YOU WILL NOT GIVE IT TO ME ... I WILL TAKE IT."

FERMILAB USED TO BE A GOOD NEIGHBOR. WHAT A SHAME ... WHAT A DISGRACE ... WHAT A DISAPPOINTMENT ... THIS IS WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE NOW ...

IF YOU WANT TO STOP THIS OBNOXIOUS INTRUSION UPON YOUR HOME, FAMILY AND ENVIRONMENT, THEN PLAN TO ATTEND THE FINAL DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY HEARINGS ON OCTOBER 6th & 7th AT WAUBONSIE VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL. THIS IS YOUR LAST CHANCE BEFORE THE DYNAMITING STARTS AND THE TRUCKS BEGIN TO ROLL!

"FERMILAB IS NO LONGER A GOOD NEIGHBOR"

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SUPER COLLIDER

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The first time I was involved in community activism over issues with Fermilab, I received threatening phone calls. That was in the late 1980s, revolving around efforts to keep the Superconducting Super Collider from being sited here. I was one of the organizers of Citizens Against the Collider Here (CATCH), so I was an easy target for critics and for the press. But there is no comparison with my latest experience, which was characterized by the calm voices of reason, and which has left me guardedly optimistic about the future of the lab-community connection.

In working with the Fermilab Community Task Force on Public Participation, I found myself to be completely wrong on three counts: first, with my background from the SSC days, I thought I'd be regarded as the skunk at the garden party; second, when I spoke my mind, I thought no one was listening; and third, my frustration with the committee process led me to think we could not produce a readable, effective document. But as I readily admit, I was wrong, wrong, and wrong again—nothing at all like those old SSC days.

But I should emphasize that the confrontation over the SSC was not Fermilab against the community; it was mainly the State of Illinois, and the huge political steamroller we were fighting, that was the source of the antagonism. I didn't know what the SSC was, but a friend and neighbor telephoned me to ask if I knew about this SSC thing, and did I know it was supposed to be going under my house. I started making phone calls locally and couldn't get answers to my questions. So I called the governor's office in Springfield. There, they were indignant that I would have the gall to question their decisions.

That got to me, I can tell you. Then I looked over some economic papers that were put out by an organization headed by the governor's point man for the SSC effort, and by the Department of Energy and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. I have a PhD in economics from the University of Illinois, and in my humble opinion, they were doing what one economist calls “jobalism.” Essentially, they were redefining labor costs as a benefit, saying that jobs created were benefits, but that's really a cost in economic analysis. If you do that in evaluating federal projects, there is no proposal that wouldn't look good.

The SSC went to Texas, and we were happy. We felt we had made at least some level of impact.

When I came to the first meeting of the Fermilab Community Task Force some 17 years later, I was nervous, and said as much. I thought it would be confrontational, and I'd be outnumbered 25-to-1. But most of the people didn't remember the SSC days, although Mayor Vivian

Lund of Warrenville and Mayor Jeff Schielke of Batavia were there, and they had been quite closely involved. One thing I'll never forget is that Judy Jackson of Fermilab Public Affairs came over and talked with me and made me feel welcome. That helped a lot. I felt as if I wasn't being set up for a beating.

About halfway through the process of drafting a document, I became very frustrated because it was taking so long. I had always been on my own as an airline pilot for 32 years—never worked in committees. But when I spoke with our facilitator, David Bidwell of The Perspectives Group, he told me it had to be done that way, to make sure all the contributions were included. When the draft was finished, he massaged it a bit and it really turned out well. It was a document that I was proud to be associated with. In addition, I had made a little presentation in one of our early meetings, and with the questions that people asked me afterward, I almost felt as if they hadn't heard me at all, and I hadn't accomplished anything. Yet in the end, almost every point I had raised was dealt with in that final proposal.

My hopes are that most, if not all, of that proposal will be adopted by the laboratory. I think it will. I'm not concerned about the near term. The new director, Pier Oddone, seems pleased with the guidelines. What I'm concerned about is going forward: What about the next director? Everything depends on people, whether a lab director, or people from the Department of Energy, or from the State of Illinois. I hope we can keep politics out of it. I hope we can keep this level of public participation active at the lab, but it will depend on the investment of the lab management, citizens' groups, and all the other groups involved. Time will tell.

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Craig Jones was a Naval aviator from 1962 to 1967, and a commercial airline pilot for 32 years. He is retired and lives in St. Charles, Illinois.

Photo: Fermilab Visual Media Services