

Sharon Approves Nuclear

By JONATHAN P. TURNER

SHARON—When residents unanimously adopted a nuclear-free zone ordinance on Friday, Sharon joined five other Litchfield County municipalities in banning the use and storage of most radioactive materials. Although the measure is considered mainly symbolic, those involved with the nuclear-free movement say the ordinances can potentially affect state and Federal policy.

"We have regarded it as a symbolic gesture, but it is also a signal to Hartford," said Melvin Elliott, a resident who helped draft Sharon's ordinance. "It is a powerful sign of solidarity with other Northwest Corner towns and moves us all one step closer toward a safe and sane energy policy in the U.S."

Nuclear-free zones were approved this year in Salisbury, Cornwall, Kent and Watertown, and similar bans on radioactive waste were adopted in Winsted, East Lyme, and New Haven. Sharon's nuclear-free zone ordinance prohibits the storage of radioactive waste except for refuse produced by the Sharon Hospital, and those can be stored for one year. No radioactive waste may be transported through town except in clearly marked vehicles and with advance notice to town officials, according to the ordinance.

It also allows nuclear energy to be used for medical applications, electricity and as part of training sessions for emergency personnel who must learn to handle radioactive waste in case of an accident, Mr. Elliott said. According to the ordinance, the town could levy fines of up to \$500 for violations of the measure.

The Sharon measure was spurred in part because a 233-acre parcel in town—including land owned by the Sharon Country Club—has been selected by the Connecticut Hazardous Waste Management Service as a back-up site for the state's first low-level radioactive waste disposal facility. The Sharon site will only be considered if problems arise with the top three candidate sites, located near Hartford in Ellington, East Windsor and South Windsor.

A preferred site for the dump is expected to be chosen by the end of 1992, and state officials claim that they can override any measures municipalities pass that would ban the dump.

Mr. Elliott said that the Sharon ordinance is not specifically designed to prevent a radioactive waste dump from being sited in town, but is meant to advocate a healthy and safe environment

as well as prompt a re-evaluation of the nation's energy policy.

"Certainly, the more towns in Connecticut that fall into line, the more it will be obvious to state and national representatives that there is a strong grass-roots feeling about this," he said.

First Selectman Robert Moeller said that "we must be careful, however, not to put too much faith in simplistic solutions such as the nuclear-free zone. While I have reservations about this move because I believe it will lull many residents into a complacent attitude regarding the dump, I support anything that has even the most remote possibility of helping Sharon."

Charles Johnson, executive director of the Baltimore, Md.-based resource center, Nuclear Free America, said that the movement in the U.S.—which has 180 nuclear-free zones—is a "relatively quiet, slow, grass-roots movement. Ultimately, it does have an impact, just as 20 years ago, the anti-apartheid movement began to encourage divestment, and it slowly built into an effective form."

"In Connecticut, they have taken a very principled position that they don't want this waste dump and they also don't want to generate the waste that requires such a dump," he said. "A nuclear-free zone is more principled than just saying 'Not in my backyard.'"

With several Connecticut towns joining the nuclear-free bandwagon, "if you pile them up, it's going to have an impact," said Robert Finn, president of Sharon Together Against a Nuclear Dump, the grass-roots organization working to eliminate the town from consideration for the dump.

Charlene LaVoie, an attorney who helped draft Winsted's resolution last fall, claims that anti-nuclear ordinances could influence the state's plans because "the area that has the least resistance wins the dump site. I think that every speck of resistance that a community can generate is absolutely crucial."

CHWMS spokeswoman Anita Baxter said that anti-radioactive waste acts have not, and will not influence the site selection process. "I don't think it disrupts the process at all," she added. "The site selection is a state mandate that really overrides that kind of action on the part of local government."

In July, Kent became the first municipality in the nation to incorporate its nuclear-free zone ordinance into town zoning regulations, a move designed to