Harvard energy fight may end

By Andrew Robbin

Ten years of battling may soon end for Harvard University, when the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Quality and Engineering (DEQE) announces its decision on the $230 million Medical Area Total Energy Plant (MATEP).

MATEP was proposed by Harvard a decade ago to provide a comprehensive energy package (steam, chilled water, and electricity) to twelve area hospitals. The area is currently served by the Boston Edison Company and the Blackfan Street Powerhouse.

"Harvard went into this with the idea of doing several things which, by any measure, were good," said Robert L. Hermos, Harvard Director of External Projects, in a recently published Harvard Magazine article.

Dr. John A. Hermos, Chairman of Brookline Citizens to Protect the Environment, gave a different summary of the past ten years. "Harvard has made a number of bad decisions that have left them with a plant we feel is unapprovable," he commented during a taped conversation with Kenneth Hagg, Director of Air Quality Control for the DEQE.

The whole decision now hinges on the "hot-spot" issue, according to Hagg. Hot spots are small areas where higher NO2 levels are found, due to automobile exhaust. It is unclear at present how the proposed plant will affect such areas. The Federal Environmental Protection Agency has yet to set short-term standards on NO2 emissions, despite authorizations in the 1977 Clean Air Act Amendments.

Construction began on the plant on November 16, 1980, having received state permission to sink foundations despite the lack of an approved air quality plan. According to Hermos, then-Environmental Commissioner Stanley told Harvard they were proceeding at their own risk, and any expenses incurred would not affect any later environmental decisions.

Harvard submitted an air quality plan on January 24, 1977. Months of public hearings followed, and about a year later, the DEQE approved the steam and chilled water portions, but rejected MATEP's diesel electric generators. Both decisions were appealed, the first by the Brookline group, the second by Harvard. On October 12, 1978, Harvard was allowed to proceed construction on steam and chilled water facilities, without the approval of the diesel portion. Five months later, Harvard declared its agreement with the DEQE decisions, again rejecting the diesel generators.

Harvard presented another plan in June of 1979, which required a second series of public hearings. The DEQE rejected Harvard a second time, on November 30, 1979.

Shortly thereafter, according to Hermos, "The Department no longer represented the interests of protecting public health, but became closely aligned with the goals of Harvard University." Hermos explained that the DEQE and MATEP officials began to work together to find an appealing plan, without another set of public hearings. This plan was called the comprehensive energy package (steam, chilled water, and electricity) to twelve area hospitals.

Opponents then brought up the hot-spot issue, and on May 27, 1980, Harvard again appealed, and a third set of hearings began.

"MATEP is the most difficult problem we've ever had to deal with," noted Hagg, "but a decision will be made very shortly." He was quick to add, however, that the conflict may be carried directly to the courtroom, regardless of the decision.

Gray addresses GA concerns

By Andrew Washburn

Citing a need for members of the MIT community to "step away from parochial concerns, to stop grinding their axes in order to view the broader issues," MIT President Paul Gray '54 addressed the General Assembly in his Memorial Drive home at Thursday's regular meeting.

"Trust and confidence... people have to view each other in this light." This sentiment was the focus of Gray's remarks, in which he emphasized his perception of the presence of a "widely-shared sense of good feeling and community spirit" at MIT.

Gray responded to a wide range of questions from GA representatives. Asked about his inaugural address to the world's people, he expressed the view that "our responsibility ought to be to make students want to devote their energies to working on these problems."

Gray also said that one of the chief concerns of MIT administrators in the wake of Ronald Reagan's victory was what the "attitude of the new administration on the subject basic research will be."

Responding to the suggestion that there is an adversarial relationship between students and administrators, President Gray acknowledged that administrative bureaucracy was often perceived as a "faceless organism," but that his goal was to allow people to "have their way, even if it doesn't have their way." The president then agreed with the suggestion that he set aside time on a regular basis to allow students to speak with him informally.

In other business, Royce Flippin, the new Director of Athletics, said that the Athletic Department's philosophy of ensuring participation could be supported by a new floor for the duPont Gymnasium in "the works" for next May or June. At the request of several members of the GA, he also pledged to review the registration process for physical education.

Undergraduate Association President Chuck Markham '81 reported that the faculty had elected to begin one week earlier next fall term in order to avoid final examinations during the week of Christmas. The proposal was made to suggestions made by the GA on Spring Weekend and suggestions for improvement were also discussed. In addition, the GA heard recommendations by the Executive Board of the GA to adopt a comprehensive set of rules and regulations for the GA similar to those now in use by the faculty.

MBTA solution in hands of court

By Tim Kreisle

The resolution of the current Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority (MBTA) fiscal dilemma is currently in the hands of the State Supreme Judicial Court. The court plans to evaluate the legality of Governor Edward King's emergency takeover of the "T" later this week.

No decisive action has been taken by the courts since the MBTA Advisory Board first challenged King's takeover. Prior to the takeover, Suffolk County Superior Court Judge William G. Young issued an order prohibiting the MBTA from extending its $302 million budget, but has since rescinded it in favor of the Governor's order.

The Board's suit is now being evaluated by the State Supreme Court which hopes to rule on this week in King's action. Should the Governor be found to have acted in a "legally proper fashion," the MBTA funding will continue on its present emergency basis until the end of the year. If not, the T will be forced to shut down operations unless the legislature or the Advisory Board vote to spend additional funds.

King has been supplying money for continued transit operation ever since the T depleted its $302 million annual budget last week. The money has been supplied by the Governor from unspecified state sources.

King took over MBTA funding last week when it became apparent that neither the Massachusetts Legislature nor the Board were willing to supply the extra money needed to keep the system running. The Advisory Board represents the 79 metropolitan Boston municipalities which are legally responsible for financing half of the T's operating budget. A significant consequence of King's action is that the Board is held accountable for half of the costs incurred while the T is under emergency control — even though it had voted several times against additional expenditures for the current year.

Because the Advisory Board felt that King's actions were unfair to the cities and towns it represents, it challenged King's constitutional right to approve funding without the consent. Members of the Board, however, insist that they don't want the T shut down. At William Semich, Weston's Board representative, said after the suit was filed last week, "It's [the legal action] intended to make the governor go through legal channels to keep the system running."

The board also has the power to refuse the T's funding, but has resisted all motion to date intended to aid the T. The sentiment in the legislature appears to be one of opposition to any control of the T's operating budget. As indicated by recent votes on labor structure within the MBTA, most legislators feel that management should assume responsibility for functions such as control of overtime hours and assignment of employees to positions. The major reduction in cost attributable to these measures is held to be quite large. Despite these feelings, a bill drafted by a coalition of legislators and public organizations headed by State Representatives David Cohen (D-Chelsea Hill) and Michael Barrett (D-Reading) failed to pass during special session last Thursday even though union power changes were a vital part of the bill.