

EDITORIALS

Good neighbor cleaning up contamination

Raytheon continues to be a good neighbor. Raytheon Corp. had a long run in the town of Wayland, operating a plant on Boston Post Road for four decades, until closing the doors in 1996.

The relationship between the plant and the town wasn't always a smooth one, but Raytheon did its share of work as a good citizen, supporting local causes and acting as a major donor when the Wayland public library, and later the Goodnow Library, were expanded and renovated.

Raytheon was a major employer, bringing in a wave of well-educated professionals who settled into Wayland, Sudbury, Framingham and other MetroWest communities, and brought their own energy to the lives of those towns.

After the plant closed, the town was faced with an uncertain future for a site contaminated with potentially toxic chemicals, PCBs and heavy metals that polluted tracts of wetlands. Tests on the 83-acre site have found an underground plume of perchloroethylene; studies are under way to determine the extent of contamination, given that the town's drinking water wells aren't too distant.

But Raytheon didn't just walk away from the plant when it closed. Hard bargaining and ongoing discussions among town officials, residents and representatives from Raytheon have yielded a plan and a timetable for the cleanup. In fact, after residents and officials went to the state to allow the public a say in the process, the state put the cleanup under the state's Public Involvement Process, kicking off a long series of public meetings.

Residents had their say, many times over, and the company, to its credit, set up a Web site and has posted information about meetings and filings consistently.

The first stage of the cleanup – removal of contaminated soil from an acre and a half of wetlands, and restoring the tract to its natural state – is expected to get under way next month.

The town of Wayland and the company that owns the property, Congress Group Ventures of Cambridge, have compelling interests in seeing that the site is cleaned up. The company knows that a clean industrial site would be easier to lease or sell, especially since there is a surplus of empty office and manufacturing space in the region. The town sees the former Raytheon site as a key part of Wayland's vibrant commercial stretch.

Getting the property into shape so potential employers see it as a desirable place to launch a venture or relocate an existing one is high on everyone's list.

When Raytheon was in its heyday in Wayland, hundreds of employees frequented area restaurants, stores, banks and gas stations, helping keep the lifeblood of the commercial stretch pumping. The town could only benefit from having a contaminated site cleaned up and manufacturing space humming with workers.

Both sides deserve a tip of the hat for moving so decisively in the right direction.