BROADWATER DRAWBACKS:

The Broadwater Energy corporation wants to build an enormous floating liquefied natural gas terminal in the middle of eastern Long Island Sound. Most of the gas will be used to generate electricity, mostly for the New York metropolitan area. Residents and regulators are hotly divided on this issue. I'm not. It's a logical, but profane, idea.

The Big Apple uses a scandalous amount of electricity to keep its economy going during the day and the skyline bright at night. To this baseline demand for electric power, we must add the growing need for air conditioners to combat global warming and for power-consuming absurdities such as gigantic outdoor televisions posing as highway advertising billboards. The Broadwater solution is to supply more gas to power the electric turbines, rather than to encourage a reduction in demand. This is wrongheaded.

Other sources of energy have drawbacks. Nuclear fuels frighten. Coal is dirty. Petroleum is expensive. Hydropower chops rivers into segments. Solar isn't there on gray winter days. Windmills club birds and make green mountain ridges sound like heliports. Fuel cells just aren't here yet.

Given the state of environmental politics in the Northeast, the greater use of natural gas should be part of the solution, especially since there's plenty of gas in the world, some of which is being flamed off for lack of a market.

The problem is getting the gas where it's needed. The present on-land pipeline system bringing gas from the West has a virtual monopoly and is running close to capacity. Plus, it disrupts forests and lowers property values. Gas transport (in liquid form) by ocean-going tankers does provide a good alternative. So why the fuss about Broadwater?

Because the potential for an LNG disaster rises with the scale. If a tank of gas blows up, grilled burgers might go flying or a house might be blown away. But if an LNG facility blows up, the force of the explosion could flatten a port city. If it merely ruptures and leaks, the downwind plume of vapor could be deadly. No waterfront city or shoreline town wants an LNG facility in port.

Broadwater's solution is to site the facility beyond the blast or vapor zone. That way, if it does blow up, the only thing residents will see is a giant burst of flame. All they will hear is an explosive boom, followed by rumblings of manmade thunder. All they will feel is the puff of a breeze instead of a shock wave that could blow them away.

But be on guard against the disingenuous name "Broadwater" and the energy multinationals (Shell and TransCanada) that thought it up. Long Island Sound may or may not be broad enough to accommodate the explosive hazard and dilute the ecological damage of a permanently moored facility, increased tanker traffic and new pipelines. I'll leave those decisions to the regulators. But I do know one thing. The waters aren't broad enough to hide the visual blight of an industrialized Long Island Sound, a body of water we've spent decades trying to save.

The LNG plan goes beyond the respectful use of nature for human benefit. Broadwater's owners would float a metal platform, then cable it in place as a pretend island of safety. There, they would convert liquid hydrocarbon to gas, then pipe it to solid land so that it can be burned inside a building from which tentacles of buzzing wires will exit. The burning will make more carbon dioxide, which will raise the demand for electricity, which will raise the demand for gas, which will warm the earth even more. The sheer craziness of this scenario must be telling us that something's wrong.
So, here’s my idea to help defeat the LNG plan. The next time someone brings it up, ask them what they would think if the project were named Vesuvius, after a famous volcano, instead of Broadwater, after the imagined safety of an expansive sea.