

Transcript: September 26th, 2024, at 5:30pm

Vermont Public Service Department Public Hearing on Determination of Energy Compliance for the Lamoille County Enhanced Energy Plan

01:01

Okay. So we've got a couple people online. So we have a sign in sheet around and we should also note who's online as well. Yeah, Michael, online is with us. Okay. But what advocacy did you want to do? Is this there for the other panelists? Let's get you up. So we're gonna do this. Talk from there around for now. Quick, Q.

01:30

And the date today is what? The 26th. Yeah.

01:42

Should we do, okay, so we're officially recording, right? Should we start with introductions? Sure, well, the department is officially holding this hearing. Thank you for hosting. And, you know, because it's an official public hearing, there are certain things that I have to go over, the script, so my name is,

02:10

TJ Poor, I'm the director of the planning division at the Department of Public Service. With me here is Claire McIlvennie, who you met already, who's our data and equity policy manager. And on the Zoom or Teams call is Michael Swain, who's an attorney in our public advocacy division. And is Julie not here? Julie's not here, okay. So that's it from the Department of Public Service.

02:39

And we're obviously doing this hearing in a hybrid form here at the Lamoille County Planning Commission as well as remote. Hopefully things will go smoothly, but please bear with us if there are technical difficulties. I think we're all used to those now. You know, I think everybody's on mute who's online to start with. But if you just use your raise and function if you want to

03:08

if you want to participate and comment. It doesn't look like anybody's joining by phone. So, that's all right. And then what we'll do is turn it over to the Lamoille County Planning Commission, but also just want to offer a little context for our hearing and why we do a hearing. And so Act 174 from, it was in 2016, is that right? Yeah.

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At the time created a new planning process for Vermont Regional Planning Commission's and pursuant to the process, the Commission has the option of submitting a duly adopted plan to the Commissioner of the Department of Public Service, our boss Commissioner Tierney, for an affirmative determination of compliance with the statutory standards of 24 VSA 4352.

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So what that really means in more plain language is when a plan gets a compliance determination from the department, the Public Utility Commission, who's the ones who decide siting matters and issues certificates of public good for energy generation facilities. When a commission has that affirmative compliance determination, then

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The Public Utility Commission is required to provide substantial deference, as the language, in those proceedings to the land conservation measures and specific policies contained in the plan. And, in particular, when they're reviewing any proposed electric generation facility in the region.

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In 2018, the Lamoille County Planning Commission submitted a request and received an affirmative compliance determination. Since then, they've adopted a new regional plan and developed an enhanced energy plan amendment and recently submitted this to the

Department of Public Service and for the affirmative determination of compliance with those statutory standards. So...

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All of that is lead up to say the purpose of this hearing is really to gather input from the public regarding the current request for determination that the plan and enhance energy plan amendment complies with the energy planning requirements that are set forth in statute. Ultimately, if the department finds that the plan and the amendment comply and the.

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land conservation measures and specific policies contained in the plan will receive that substantial deference and siting cases. So really, you know, it is intended to give some control, some planning control to regions in order to say where they want renewable energy generation to be sited.

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We've asked Meghan to begin the hearing with a brief overview of the plan amendment, and then after which we'll provide opportunity for the input. So think unless it's like a brief clarifying question, just full of questions till the end of the presentation.

06:46

There's only a few of us here, so I think we can figure out the order of speaking and how we do comment on the fly after the event. And if you're on the phone, please do just raise your hand. We'll start with folks in the room and then go to the call.

07:09

The last formality, I think, before we start, in addition to the recording, we're taking a transcript of tonight's hearing and please do when you come forward and speak. If you could spell your name, it would be very helpful for the transcript, just for the record. So that, I will turn it over to the Lamoille County Planning Commission. Thank you.

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I have a brief presentation to share, which will provide an overview of our energy plan amendment.

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All right. You can go to the next slide. So, so yeah, some of our board members who are with us here tonight are already familiar with this plan, but I just wanted to provide a brief overview as part of this public hearing process. So, you mentioned there was amendments to our enhanced energy plan, to our existing

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Regional Plan that was updated in 2023. Can everybody see this on Zoom too? Yeah, we're officially sharing. Okay, great. So yeah, this highlights the process we took to get here and what was involved with the energy plan amendment. The first step was really to look at the data in the plan and update

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old data sources and pull in new information, as well as pull in new LEAP modeling, targets analysis provided by the Vermont Public Service Department. And they also have a generation scenario tool as well which shows you a snapshot of those targets later. So that was kind of our first step to really dive into newer data and pull that into the amendment.

09:16

And then meanwhile, while we were doing that, we had our lovely assistant planner, Alberto, who's sadly leaving us. He was diving into the LEAP modeling data and disaggregating it to the municipal level using municipal energy shares that were developed from a municipal consumption tool that was provided by Vermont Public Service Department. And so we were doing that

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simultaneously. Those targets as municipal targets were provided to municipalities as well, planning commission chairs and Town planners and administrators as part of the process and also updated energy maps that can be used in local municipal energy plans. A lot of those we are incorporating as we work with towns on municipal plans. And the next step was really

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you know, we have these initial comments from public service department, and we wanted to make sure that we addressed those. We went through and, all the initial comments that we weren't able to address originally when we did our 2023 Regional Plan update. And we have an equity section too. That was a really important addition to this plan, and it's also required under the latest Act 174 standards and criteria 10.

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So we added that section as well. And, you know, went back to that checklist, of course, Act 174 checklist to make sure we were still meeting all the latest standards. We also met with two LCPC committees. We met with the JEDI committee, they're now called the Belonging and Inclusion Committee, as well as the Regional Plan Committee, and gathered input from them. And then we submitted a preliminary request.

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public service department. And that was really to just, you know, make sure, you know, if there was any other additions or revisions that we had to make, we had opportunity to do that before the amendment was actually warned for the final hearing. So we had two public hearings and we have one in June and one in July

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of 2024 that was to gather input as well. I addressed all additional comments that we received from the Public Service Department back in May. Our board formally adopted this energy amendment on July 23rd, 2024 and then early August is when we submitted the

determination for energy compliance. Sorry, that's a long diagram. The next one's gonna be a lot shorter.

12:09

So, we mentioned, you know, we're here today to regain our determination of energy compliance status. Why is that important? It's important because it gives us the opportunity for LCPC to review the municipal enhanced energy plans and issue a determination of energy compliance for municipal plans. So that's why this it is an important step.

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And it's also granting us substantial deference, which was mentioned earlier, and just ensuring that our plan is compliant with the latest Act from 174 standards. So this is just to highlight what substantial deference is. It gives regions and towns a stronger voice in terms of where energy...

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projects are sited or cannot be sited. I'm not gonna read the second part, but yeah, it basically provides a stronger voice for those policies and actions in the enhanced energy plans. This slide is showing the overarching statewide energy goals tied to the Global Warming Solutions Act and also the Vermont Comprehensive Energy Plan.

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Our enhanced energy plans are guided by the statewide energy goals. I wanted to show this diagram as an example, you know, and they're guided by the greenhouse gas emission reduction requirements as well as the Global Warming Solutions Act.

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Hopefully you can all see that, but this is just a snapshot. This isn't everything that our plan supports, but it's a snapshot of what our energy plan supports. We called out, we're

supporting energy conservation, energy storage, we know grid system upgrades in some areas, maybe necessary to modernize the grid system.

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We support small scale biomass, small scale wind, solar, in general, as well as micro hydro projects, like the Moscow Mills Dam and Stowe, for example, and smaller hydro projects. And then, of course, just transportation and land use policies that reduce energy demand,

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trail networks in the left-hand example.

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So this is just snapshot of a table from the 2023 Efficiency Vermont energy burden report. The equity section that we added really highlights energy burden in particular. So I just wanted to show a snapshot of that and kind of get a sense of which communities have higher energy burden in the County, such as Eden and Johnson and Waterville

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for example.

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We also added a lot of equity policies and actions as part of the equity section. I'm not going to read all these off, but it gives you an example, you know, just a snapshot of some of the more equity focused policies and actions that we added to the plan in particular.

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This is just a snapshot of current energy use. I pulled a couple of graphs from our plan. You know, it's showing consumption in the Lamoille County. So you can see that, a large part of our consumption is in the transportation and heating sector, which we would suspect.

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And then these two charts just show heating fuels, the different types of heating fuels that people are using in the Lamoille County. To no surprise, mostly fossil fuel based at this point, but in Lamoille County, there's use for amount of wood as well, 18%. And then the other graph is a snapshot of the existing generation in the Lamoille County, existing renewable generation. So obviously we have more solar.

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Couple of hydro sites, there's not much wind, so it doesn't even show up on that graph. But wind is kind of a limited resource in the county. We don't really have a lot of wind resources here.

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This is a snapshot of some of the LEAP targets that I mentioned earlier that were included in the energy plan. You can kind of see, if you look at the top one, Households Heated with Wood, you can see that over time, there's a projected slight decrease as other heating systems are installed, like heat pumps.

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There's also projections for heat pumps. Of course, we expect that demand to continue to go up in terms of the number of heat pumps that people install. And these are baseline targets, essentially, that we're working towards as a region. And of course, we hope more homes and businesses to be weatherized moving forward.

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This is the snapshot from the generation scenario tool. The targets are showing that we're aiming to incrementally generate more renewable energy and, moving forward. So by 2050, for example, this is in megawatt hours showing the output megawatt hours for additional incremental.

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generation would be around 87,000.

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So this is not the last slide, but maybe it should have been. But there's obviously challenges and obstacles to meet these targets and get there. And we all know that. We all recognize that. There's some areas that have more limited transmission headroom and are working to address those issues, but currently can't take on a lot of new generation, but can still

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implement electrification measures like install heat pumps and other more energy efficient heating systems. But there's a real need for energy storage. Obviously, we know, there's quite a cost involved with upgrading utility lines and trying to source different equipment for those projects. It can take some time and just affordability I feel like that's the theme here.

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You know, the affordability of renewable energy systems, installing new heating systems, and the fact that we are still going to need secondary heating systems. You know, in many cases, you have a larger building, where heat pumps just are not going to quite do it, you might still have a wood stove, for example, or more efficient, pellet stove. So that kind of just adds to that cost.

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You know, we're trying to continue to promote compact development because it uses less energy, but you obviously want to do that out of the floodplain moving forward. I just have one more slide and then open up to questions and discussion. This is just highlighting some of our siting policies in the energy plan. I just kind of pulled out the pieces about preferred areas. So preferred areas are

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like rooftops, for example, parking lots, brownfield sites, gravel pits. Some communities are looking at gravel pits to put solar, for example. And then it also shows the unsuitable, likely unsuitable areas such as wetlands and wilderness areas, for example, or floodways.

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I don't have a cool question slide. So if I were Seth, I'd have like a Beaver and a question mark at the end. Any questions or discussions about the energy plan? Well, I do have a couple of things. And one is I think the energy, the amendment is great.

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And I really like the inclusion of equity because I know for our utility, the cost of electricity is way up. And especially with the issues around net metering. So that's one thing. And then the other thing that is not here and it might be a tackling subject, but I've been doing a ton of reading and going to workshops and different things

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regarding the use of nuclear power. And I guess we can't include that in any of this because we're only using renewable energy and nuclear power is more clean energy. And I'm just concerned that I don't hear of any of them or even discussing it or up to date on what's actually happening in the world about this in the country. And I recently heard that

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there's gonna be one nuclear reactor reopened at Three Mile Island because Bill Gates has some big company, a data center, and he is gonna use that energy to offset buying energy from the other areas around it so that it won't impact them, impact other areas as much.

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in terms of fossil fuel. It's also going to be cheaper than buying it off the grid. Right, right. So those are the kinds of things that I just wonder. I don't have any idea, but I haven't, and I know that Barron's magazine came out with a whole article on nuclear energy, but it was

mostly about fission, not fusion, and I've also read a lot about fusion. So I'm just curious where the state...

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stands on those issues because it's like everybody's just being mummified, you know. Yeah, as far as the state is concerned, I mean the Department of Public Service last year put forward a proposal for a clean energy plan that included nuclear as an eligible resource to get clean. That's not ultimately what was passed. Or no, I just spoke with

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somebody this week, a legislator, who I won't name here, but they, I don't know if they read the same articles you did, but we wanted to talk about the modular nuclear, like, you know, small scale nuclear and how that fits. And I think right now it's, you don't hear about it as much because it's pretty far away in terms of technology deployment and it being cost effective and by pretty far and midway.

24:00

You know, in the 10, 15, 20 year range. But, and so we're at a stage where we, that kind of R and D needs to happen at the federal scale. But it is something, you know, as far as, you know, the way we look at resources is we look at their characteristics and their, you know, and cost is one of them, you know, their, whether.

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when they produce, like in their base load power or intermittent and know if they produce at times of a high energy need and how the reliability of the resource and the nuclear checks a lot of those boxes, it comes with their its own issues as we're all aware and we still don't have a solution

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So as far as the state goes, we kind of, we look at it as other resources and kind of weigh those things. And we're definitely keeping an eye on those small scale modular units. And if

they're, you know, develop, the technology develops to a point where they could be applicable in Vermont. We want to set ourselves up to be able to take advantage of that. So we'll.

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It's kind of a we'll see, we're kind of monitoring and keeping an eye on it. Yeah. Good. Yeah. So, I don't know how the region thinks about it as a resource, but I think in terms of the challenges, that's like the same type of analysis that you're looking at. Yeah. Yeah, I think we, you know, I know some communities have

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kind of talked about it and maybe it came up in Hyde Park meetings. No, I've just been interested in it because the changes in the issues that were around safety have been dramatic. And it might not be something that can be done this year, but I think it just behooves us to start looking at it and studying it so that we're prepared because the biggest issue for most people

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is safety and disposal of the waste. But the technologies are changing pretty rapidly around that. I'm just curious, it'd be really nice if there could be conversations going on. So not to say we have to have nuclear and anything like that, but so that people are aware of the changes. Right. You know, because I don't know, I think it's important. Because it can be a-

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could be really important in these months. Yeah. So. I will say the legislature did just pass the law this spring that requires utilities to get 100% of its energy from renewable resources by 2035. Right. So, you know, as far as the administration goes, we're still trying to be open for that. And as far as utilities go, they're able to, still able to...

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procure power for any resource, they just need to have that, purchase the attributes, the renewable energy credits to kind of cover their load. So there's still a way to get around it, but that, you know, the current state of the legislature's past policy is to focus on renewables. But I hear what you're saying. Yeah, thank you. I'm pushing on that right now, because I've just...

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attended a couple of conferences and got a little bit more educated and I'm still a little dangerous with my knowledge. Little sidebar but to hear your interest in talking about it, I think you mentioned we put the administration put forward a proposal for energy standard and that was based on some public engagement, we had done in part with the regional planning Commission. We were. Again.

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to hold some conversations around it, which I think we found really informative. And I've definitely thought about how to continue them in the future. So it's always helpful to hear that folks are also interested in having more of those conversations. Yeah, I think it came up in, when we did those, you know, those few, posted a few webinars and so forth around just like, electricity policies in general.

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that actually came up in that setting as well. Yeah. So yeah, it's definitely a topic to keep talking about now. Well, it's also interesting that are we gonna be able to, it's always a reach to say we're gonna be able to reach our goal for renewable energy by 20, whatever it is, 35 or something. But, you know, at some point we're gonna have to open up our minds a little bit, I think.

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Yeah, appreciate your comment, Riki. Do we want to just stop sharing to see if there's anybody on the screen who had comments or questions?

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I also want to comment a little bit more on what Riki said. Some of the newer technology on fusion, I might have it backwards. I mixed them up. A lot of people are extremely concerned about the waste. And one of the reasons besides handling waste.

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and moving waste with the federal government since the inception since back in the 50s and 40s. The waste is valuable. They don't want to throw it away or throw it as far away as something. If they get the fission running, they can use the fuel or the spent fuel to create fission reactions. And so they'll use it up and it will pretty much go away.

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Which is something that a lot of people don't understand about nuclear. And the other thing, especially around small plants and people think, well, a nuclear plant is a nuclear plant. But every submarine in our fleet has got a nuclear reactor in it, about the size of a 30 gallon ash can. And because they're in the ocean, they don't worry that much about cooling. But most of the plants, a lot of people are afraid of the ocean.

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the place in Japan that just had crack. But they don't need to set up with large bodies of water because almost all of their water is manufactured and they keep it because it costs them so much to make the water they use so that it doesn't scale up their plant and mess up their plant. So when they make water, they use it in the plant. The cooling water is just, it doesn't even get near it radioactive.

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just there to cool it. And actually, instead of a cooling tower where you see the big plumes of smoke, the cooling can be subsurface, so you wouldn't even know it was around. And a nuclear plant can be twice the size of this room and yet probably take care of all of the moisture. And given that we're looking at rural areas, smaller ones would, I think, benefit.

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people better, especially if we're heading towards a clean energy as it's both just renewable.

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Smaller plants in rural areas create a job force that can relocate easily to run these plants. And again, if they gotta go, oh, I gotta move all the way to Seabrook to get a job in a nuclear power plant, that's crazy. They always made them bigger because of scale. And it was the grid that could afford to build them. But the technology for the smaller ones has increased because the U.S. government is making smaller ones all the time.

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and they're usually in a can that they can pick up and move around, you know, that type of thing. So I think the opportunity, especially for a whole state like Vermont, is to have the smaller, little one. And I think we have a great opportunity. I think it's a ways away, like you said. And so my original question myself was about wood fired. I know that it does have some carbon, as opposed to

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wood stoves, your chart indicated pretty much what people were burning in homes. Is that correct? Yeah. It wasn't, I know some schools have larger boilers. Right, it was the household. What you had was household. Around, and I'll use the other night we had a meeting about the small industrial apartment, by the way, large from Morrisville, but small in scale, precise for industrial apartment.

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but a small 15 to 20 watt megawatt power plant that burned chips or gasified chips would take care of a whole area with heat and electricity. There would be no wheeling charge to all the little industrial places. So the electricity could be cheaper, which would attract more business to create more jobs. But also beyond the wheeling,

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A cogeneration with the steam, steam can be piped up to six miles. I just did that down in Montpelier. They ran a lot of new steam lines. But, you know, if nothing else, we could melt snow in Morrisville Village and probably heat the municipal buildings, all the schools for the sake of, you know, water line, yes, we still have to have that infrastructure, but a 15, 20 megawatt plant would do that very well. The other end that I look at and I look for the

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different bottom lines. The forest here in Vermont keep getting fractured and the smaller they get, the less efficient they are for the logging industry. But around just cutting pulp or damage to our crappy trees and leaving prime species growing, a lot of the small landowners wanna do that. That's a green thing to do. Don't come in and get the best lumber, which they call selective cutting.

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come in and take some of the junk out. But also too, in a municipal plant like that, and they have such better scrubbers on the stacks and they can monitor and control stuff so much better. And especially around gasification of wood, that technology has been proven. There's also a use for the lignin that comes out of a plant. So,

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I think around generating, and again, it's swell. So you might have one in Morrisville, you might not have one over in Cambridge. You might have one over in Hadrian. Also from everything I hear from the Northern forest people, there's plenty of wood. We're never gonna run out, we're not gonna denude the forest. And if anything, we're gonna improve the forests for wildlife and recreation. And the resource for wood.

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as all of New England and all of the maritime provinces. Again, so we're not gonna run out of work. So I think there's an opportunity there for small rural communities to look into stuff like that. Also a plant, just wood plant. It's gonna last about 40 years, 50 years, and it's gonna have to have, and that's a good size gap.

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for us to catch up with some of these other things. So then also the technology is here. We can call up on the phone and find somebody that wants to set up a power plant in our town, whatever town it is, especially if we want to pair it with a development like this new industrial park. Again, the site itself, you wouldn't even see it in an industrial park. It'd just be another low-slung building. They don't have to have big towers and things like that anymore.

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Yeah, yeah, and the plan definitely does support, you know, residential and commercial scale biomass. So, you know, they'll be supported by our energy plan. So that's great. That's why I wanted to know that it wasn't being forgotten about or shut out. And then actually just recently, Marshall Water and Light wrote it against a digester, but also around a plant that's already set up.

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a digester could be set up for a lot of organic matter and the fuel could be used on site. Right. Again, not saving trucking and getting better efficiencies and having some extra room down here to put it in, you know. Yeah I know there was a digester study done a couple of years back but it was more focused on like the brewery ways. Right. And I think the end result was...

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It just wasn't cost effective. No, you remember that? Yeah, and it was mostly around having enough feedstock too. Right. Also on a mixture feedstock instead of just the brewery because of the potency of the material or the BTU value in the material. I'm going to say that. I think I measure it on how much gas it can make. Yeah. But we also are still, we're trying to compost or we're trying to compost.

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better to reduce our solid waste things. And I think there's an opportunity there that also again will create jobs. Those are college jobs for operating those plants. Those are high-tech, technician-sized jobs. And we need to create more things like that in our communities. And within driving distance, if you have to move two towns over, there's another one over there.

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Again, I think we're better off staying small. It also won't impact our grids as much if we're just producing this much here. And if we're using it right there too, what goes out onto the grid, it's gonna be minimal, but it's gonna augment everything else. Yeah, that's a good point.

39:07

Thanks again. Yeah. Appreciate this comment. Where's the new industrial park? Right across from the airport. Going down and going down. Yep. And I always take stagecoach. I like never drive in the church. Well, and right now it looks a lot like a cornfield. Yeah. Sorry, that was a sidebar. Fair question.

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No, again, also that right now, some of our main transmission lines are there. And there's also a switching station near there, too. So a lot of what more water and light have. But I'm just aware of some of the things here, but I'm sure some of the other cities and towns also have the ability, especially if they're planning a industrial park or an industrial area or perhaps a new high school or something. Away from the river. Yeah.

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Yeah, definitely. A new town hall away from the river. But again, it seems silly, but again, I think we have a lot of the infrastructure already exists, including the right of ways of the highways to bring things together.

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Yeah. Great. Do you have any other comments or things that are both really interesting topics? Yeah. It's interesting. Yeah. That's why I'm glad that this is being put in the plan and that we've talked about it. We're aware of it. If somebody asks, especially any municipality or perhaps a corporation that comes in and says, hey, I thought maybe I could help out these people by building a plant. We won't have to just stop from scratch.

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To explain to the general public why this is a good idea. We already looked at what would be good ideas and this eased in very nicely. I really appreciate the work you guys have done on the plan. Well, appreciate your input. I know we always have input from board of directors. Appreciate it. And Dan, are you also on the board or just as one of the local? I'm on the board. I'm a representative from the Town of Morristown.

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Well, before we officially close the hearing, I also wanted to say before and so I'll say it now just to thank you to the planning commission for kind of the pre engagement or pre filing type of engagement that we've had and the willingness to work with our office to really have a plan that can be, you know,

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as specific as this one will get and work towards kind of continual improvement in these plans because I think that's. it's been. You know, I know i've heard from Claire and other staff members that has been really great working with you to actually move this forward, so I just want to on the record, thank you for kind of how you operate as a planning Commission in this space.

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Same to you all, thank you. And Claire provided a lot of preliminary review and it was really helpful to us. So we appreciate that process and that opportunity. You know, we wouldn't be where we are today if we didn't have that opportunity. But thank you. And I think to Riki's comment, the equity section was one of the pieces that we really, yeah, like you really took our feedback from the original plan to heart. And I think like really ran with some of the.

42:49

the additions that you made in the analysis. So yeah, just echo that to Jason. Thank you. Yeah. Appreciate all your time. Excellent. So I think we can officially adjourn the meeting and the transcript. And yeah, thank you. Thank you guys for. Thank you. Sure. All right, I appreciate it.