

March 12, 2021

Dear Holyoke City Councilor:

I am writing in behalf of the League of Women Voters of the Northampton Area (whose membership includes residents of Holyoke, such as myself) to request that the Holyoke City Council join the neighboring towns of Springfield, Northampton, and Amherst in passing a resolution in opposition to the planned Palmer Biomass Power Plant, which would be located in East Springfield. That plant, which would burn 1200 tons of wood each day, will be economically feasible ONLY BECAUSE Governor Baker has changed the rules, thereby making the plant eligible for state subsidies, which taxpayers throughout the state will subsidize. That is to say, the handful of municipalities in the eastern part of the state who have contracted to use Palmer’s electricity will thus be SUBSIDIZED by Holyoke’s taxpayers, and at an environmental cost that will be detrimental to all of us in the Connecticut River Valley. It will be especially detrimental to our neighbors in Springfield, which already has the unfortunate designation as the asthma capital of the United States; but we need to keep in mind that Holyoke’s children also suffer from very high levels of asthma, and that Hampden county has one of the highest covid-19 rates in the state, in part because of these underlying health issues.

Five hundred leading climate, soil, and forest scientists (including 5 from Massachusetts) recently signed a letter opposing the continued use of biomass plants to meet the world’s electricity needs. Biomass plants are NOT carbon neutral, as some would claim. Moreover, for those of us in Massachusetts who value not only the beauty and biological diversity of our forest land but also the important role that our forests play as carbon sinks that will enable us to meet our net-zero carbon emissions goals, the prospect of adding a biomass plant is horrific. The COO of Palmer claims that the plant will burn only waste wood, but the regulations provide no assurances that that would be the case. And some waste wood – such as that used in construction – would enhance the dangerous particulate matter that would be released by the plant.

I am attaching copies of the recent resolutions that were passed in Amherst, Springfield, and Northampton (the Northampton resolution awaits a second city council discussion, but they expect it to pass), a recent article by four leading scientists opposing Governor Baker’s decision to subsidize biomass electric plants, comments by the Attorney General of Massachusetts concerning Governor Baker’s changes to the biomass regulations, and a letter opposing the biomass plant from the Greater Boston Physicians for Social Responsibility. WBUR also published an informative article on this subject, which you can find at this link: <https://www.wbur.org/earthwhile/2020/12/22/biomass-palmer-springfield-asthma-rps-change>

 Sincerely,

 

 Sharon Farmer

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 Holyoke