

Environmental Master Plan Comments

Public Hearing, Sept. 5, 2019

Toms River, NJ

By Peggy Middaugh, Manchester and UU Faith Action

My name is Peggy Middaugh and I'm from Manchester. Thank you for holding this public forum, and particularly thank you for coming to Toms River and Ocean County an area that has been significantly impacted by Climate Change.

I am speaking as a member of Unitarian Universalist Faith Action, New Jersey, (AKA UU Faith Action) a faith based organization that is concerned with the inherent worth and dignity of every person and Justice, equity and compassion in human relations.

We thank the BPU for its hard work in producing this blueprint for getting to 100% clean energy by 2050. We strongly support that goal but especially given the ever increasing urgency of Climate Change, we support a more aggressive approach - 100% clean energy by 2035.

As a participant with Empower New Jersey we call on the Governor to declare a moratorium on all approvals for fossil fuel power plants and pipelines until the BPU and the DEP have reconsidered any prior approvals and adopted regulations to fully implement the Energy Master Plan. We are very concerned that building fossil fuel infrastructure now will both slow the pace of getting to 100% Clean Energy and result in ratepayers and particularly LMI households bearing the costs of stranded assets down the road.

We fully support reducing energy usage as the best way to achieve a carbon free state, and we support your recommendation for increased funding for this purpose. However, achieving equitable financing of this strategy is equally important, since at present the Societal Benefits Charge places the heaviest burden on LMI households.

Last year I was the beneficiary of NJ Clean Energy Program. My home was sealed and insulated and I installed a mini-split heat pump which now provides all of my heating and cooling needs. My energy usage (100% electric home) decreased by over 50% and is more comfortable. But I didn't qualify for a 0 interest loan because I'm retired and my income was too low. In order to make sure LMI households can participate in this program, the incentive must be tweaked to include those with low incomes. The whole point is that the monthly energy savings will pay for the monthly loan payments, regardless of income. That was certainly true in my case, even though I paid up front for the mini-split unit.

I'd like to talk about plants - not the fossil fuel kind.

Tree are our allies in reducing atmospheric carbon.

- They sequester ("lock up") CO₂ in their roots, trunks, stems and leaves while they grow, and in wood products after they are harvested.
- Trees near buildings reduce heating and cooling demands, and in cities, they help reduce "heat island" effect.

Recent studies show that mature forests improve with age. Mature forests are better at storing carbon and more resilient to climate change than young forests. That's true for individual trees as well. A young, 1 inch oak tree in New Jersey reduces carbon by 20 pounds/year while a 12 inch oak in the same location reduces carbon by 425 pounds/year – almost double!! Replacing mature trees with young ones, even if done on an inch by inch basis is not equivalent. This doesn't mean that we shouldn't be planting trees – we should be, fast and furiously!

But while we're planting we are losing forests here in NJ at an alarming rate. What we're most concerned about in the context of this hearing is that we are removing trees in order to accommodate energy production projects – both fossil fuel and renewable energy projects. Whether for individual buildings or on a more industrial scale, we believe that the protection of existing trees and forests must be incentivized and tree removals dis-incentivized as part of the Energy Master Plan.