

CONSERVATION COMMITTEE REPORT

May 18, 2011
9:05–10:00 am
140 West Pine Street

Members Present: Pam Walzer, Bob Jaffe, Renee Mitchell, Dave Strohmaier, Dick Haines, Cynthia Wolken, Ed Childers, and Lyn Hellegaard, Marilyn Marler (chair), Jon Wilkins, Stacy Rye

Others Present: Ben Schmidt, Tom Javins, Mathew Koehler, Ian Lange, Phillip Persic, John Snively

I. ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS

A. Approve minutes.

Minutes of May 11, 2011 were approved as submitted.

II. FINAL CONSIDERATION AGENDA ITEMS

III. CONSENT AGENDA ITEMS

IV. REGULAR AGENDA

1. Update on the [University's](#) efforts to install or utilize biomass fuel to generate energy on campus. ([memo](#))—Regular Agenda (Dick Haines) (Referred to committee: 04/25/11) (**HELD IN COMMITTEE**) [Documents submitted for the committee's review by Mr. Ian Lange](#)

Marilyn Marler said the committee decided to continue the discussion from last week, because there was a lot of interest in topic, and several citizens wanted to give public comment.

Councilors asked staff to be brief to allow ample time for public comment.

Project update from UM

Tom Javins, the associate director for utilities and engineering at UM, reviewed the approval process for the UM biomass plant project. UM has completed a feasibility study, applied for a permit with City-County Health and is preparing a draft environmental assessment. The EA is required by the state, UM is hoping to have it published this week. They are getting ready to enter public comment phases.

Marler asked if the project had been approved by the Board of Regents? Javins answered the board has deferred any action items for this project in order to get more input from the community and student body. UM will go forward on this week and ask for permission to sell bonds for project.

Marler summarized the discussion so far: financing decisions by the Regents are separate from the outcome of the environmental assessment. Javins said there are lots of things that still need to come together for the project to move forward. UM has been approved to do a feasibility study and apply for an air quality permit. That is all they are authorized for right now.

Permitting Update from CC Health

Ben Schmidt, Air Quality Specialist, with City-County Health: The air quality permit is independent of the environmental assessment; they are on separate tracks and timelines. By June 2, CC Health will have to make a preliminary determination whether to issue the permit. When that preliminary determination is made, if a draft permit issued, the public has 15 days for comment.

After that period, CC Health is required by law to make final determination. There is an administrative review process after a permit is issued. Criteria for the permit are very limited: can the project meet carbon monoxide and particulate emission standards, and does project make it

so that the national ambient air quality standards are still being met. If those two criteria are met, CC Health is required to issue permit.

Jon Wilkins asked: Is Missoula meeting national air standards right now? Schmidt said yes, since early '90s. Missoula is still considered an attainment area for particulate.

Lyn Hellegaard asked: does the fact that UM's current boiler is in violation enter into the decision at any point? Schmidt said, based on the new national standards which took effect in 2010, was found during modeling process that the current natural gas boilers could potentially cause a violation. We can't write a permit without that being corrected.

Marler asked Schmidt: Is there a generator operating now on campus that's in violation of your office?

Tom Javins said this is a modeling non-compliance, there is a potential for the boiler to the west, #1 boiler, to have a potential violation. As soon as this was discovered, UM changed operations to maintain air quality standards. The current boilers are grandfathered in, but UM is still working to meet national standards.

Stacy Rye asked: Ben, does that mean that if #1 boiler doesn't meet air quality standards and can't get a permit, will UM have to do something else to meet their needs?

Schmidt said, since this problem was found, it has to be fixed in some fashion, either by modifying the facility or limiting production. Rye asked: What's another choice besides the biomass boiler? Schmidt said: modify stack height on existing natural gas boilers or reduce production.

Public Comment

Ian Lange thanked the committee and said he has been a Missoula resident for over 30 years. He taught at UM in the Geology Department, and has degrees in geology and geo-chemistry. He asked, what is council's role regarding this project?

Marler said the council does not have a direct role. Marler said the Council could come out with a resolution in support or against. They could make comments as individuals. The permitting process is through CC Health. Council does not have input in permit process.

Bob Jaffe said he anticipates the Council will comment on draft environmental assessment, that's the extent of what we can do. Marler said Council's comment take the form of a resolution.

Lange said he became interested in the project last fall when he read about it in the newspaper. He began to investigate the project, and found many unanswered questions. He wrote a letter to the Missoulian editor asking UM for the answers. UM's response didn't answer his questions. In terms of money, the project will not save \$1 million in energy costs, and it will raise costs significantly. It will also increase CO2 emissions according to UM's own data. He said that on May 4, he, John Snively and Matthew Koehler wrote another letter to the editor ([attached](#).)

According to UM Vice President Durringer's piece in the Missoulian, the present natural gas boiler system is very close to the end of its' useful life. If so, it is integral to the biomass system because

you have to use natural gas in the summer and in the winter in extreme temperatures. If it's integral to the system and on its last legs, then UM's first priority should be to install a new boiler system first. A new boiler system would cost between \$50-100 million. If Vice President Durringer is correct, UM needs a new gas boiler system in there before this new biomass. Proponents of the biomass project claim it will reduce the university's carbon footprint. Lange says the volume of emissions will increase and not decrease with the biomass plant. In addition, there is a world-wide glut of natural gas right now and prices are low.

The emissions modeling for the biomass project was incomplete and not done on site at the mouth of Hellgate Canyon. Proponents say the biomass plant will create jobs. Lange would ask the residents of Libby, MT, are good paying jobs are worth health risks?

Lange said he still has several unanswered questions about the project: who supplies material and at what cost, where will the wood fuel stored before it comes to campus, what about the dust associated with fuel transportation, and where will the biomass ash be disposed of.

He said the bottom line on the biomass project is that it will cost more money than the current system and decrease air quality.

Philip Persic said he has lived in Missoula for 30 years and has been an advocate for public transportation. He said, in this community we spend slightly more than \$4.2 million for Mountain Line to augment the reduction of air pollution, reduce particulates and noise pollution. One-third of ridership on Mountain Line is transporting people to and from UM. The cost to the community to provide this service to UM is easily in the \$1 million range. The University does contribute to that. The irony he sees is that the community is spending that \$1 million to support UM riders in good faith, but UM is now saying with the biomass project will add some pollution to the air but it will meet state and federal standards. He finds this contradictory. The university should set an example for the community and the state by working toward green solutions.

John Snively said the primary motivation to become involved with this issue was the potential consequences to the airshed. He has lived here 33 years and has seen the community make remarkable progress in improving air quality. He sees this project as major step backward. He has grave reservations about doubling volume of particulate emissions and hydrocarbons from UM physical plant. In a grant application the university wrote to obtain funds for this project, UM stated Missoula valley's constrained topography prevents ideal research conditions for long-term analysis of environmental impacts of efficient woody biomass boiler combustion. In essence the university is saying they want to experiment on us, and use the community as a classroom to make this technology available to other areas. To say that our precious airshed, that is known for stagnations, that has a long record of non-compliance--because of its' peculiar geographic qualities, he thinks we need to look twice and hard at any project that increases emissions.

Matthew Koehler said he came to this project in similar way as other speakers. The more he heard about UM's claims about the project, he found that their claims were not accurate and not truthfully presented. He performed an open records search at UM and reviewed more than 1000 documents and internal emails. He does not personally feel as if UM is being truthful with citizens on this project. He read from an [April 20 news report in the Missoulian](#) "Contrary to previous claims by University of Montana administrators, the university's proposed biomass boiler will not

reduce emissions to levels below that of natural gas. In fact, UM's proposed state-of-the-art biomass gasification plant will produce nearly twice as much nitrogen dioxide as its existing natural gas boilers - and in some cases, will release three times as much particulate matter...In another surprise, UM learned during preparation of the permit application that its existing natural gas boilers are in violation of county air pollution limits.”

He said there are two issues to consider: One, UM is claiming this project will reduce emissions-- it will not. Two, the existing boilers that are on campus right now are not functioning properly and are emitting more pollution than UM thought, and are in violation of county air pollution limits.

He read from a document he presented to the committee: [UM Biomass Project Annual Emission Comparison](#). He discussed the how this table shows emissions will increase with the biomass project.

Koehler says the American Lung Association grades Missoula air quality a “D”. He then read from two emails from UM Vice President Durringer to the UM president stating that the existing steam plant on campus is emitting more pollutants than it should.

<http://www.wildrockies.org/biomass/air-emissions-sound-alarm.pdf>

http://www.wildrockies.org/biomass/Durringer_3-16-11RE_emissions-copy.pdf

Koehler said that if UM retrofits and repairs the existing boilers, the cost is about \$500,000. The biomass is \$16 million and in the long-term will cost significantly more than that. If UM wants to improve its' carbon footprint and reduce emissions, it should fix the existing steam boilers. He said he would like to request that the City Council engage with CC Health to ensure that existing problems are fixed. Our air quality is way too fragile to risk with this proposal.

Mr. Koehler also asked the committee to review these documents:

<http://www.wildrockies.org/biomass/Biomass-Project-Narrative.pdf>

<http://www.wildrockies.org/biomass/EIS-required-was-at-dillion-copy.pdf>

<http://www.wildrockies.org/biomass/Javins-on-pro-forma-1.pdf>

<http://www.wildrockies.org/biomass/McKinstry-Amended-Contract.pdf>

<http://www.wildrockies.org/biomass/UM-air-Emissions-0.pdf>

Hellegaard asked: who did the environmental assessment or who is doing it? Is it the company that is selling the equipment? Her constituents are asking why UM is continuing to pursue this project if it is not reducing emissions.

Lange said the project was launched by the former UM president and stems from an agreement UM made to become carbon neutral by 2020.

Marler asked who is preparing environmental assessment? Javin said Bison Engineering out of Helena is assisting with the EA. He said the only driver on the project is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from UM. If doesn't do that, there's no point in having it. Greenhouse gas reduction is based on not burning fossil fuels but on renewable fuels.

Mr. Koehler tried to help clarify which contractor prepared the EA versus which contractor assisted with the air quality permit. He read from this contract:

<http://www.wildrockies.org/biomass/McKinstry-Amended-Contract.pdf> and stated that McKinstry-

Essention Inc. assisted with the permit. Marler clarified that Bison Engineering was assisting with the EA and McKinstry is assisting with the air quality permit. Koehler said the contracts show that all these entities are working together as subcontractors.

Dick Haines said he referred this item to the committee in response to the concerns of the other councilors. He thinks there's a lot of concern on all council members' part.

Haines said he does not want to see the City Council at odds with UM. The Council doesn't have much authority regarding this project, but it does have responsibility for the City and it doesn't stop at edge of campus. He said the Council has a bully pulpit to make things happen. The community needs a real clarification of the issues. Haines said Mr. Koehler raised several red flags areas which need to be cleaned up and clarified. Citizens have real questions that need to be answered. The EA may answer the questions, or, the project may require an EIS. At some point somebody has to answer these questions. He does not want to see the City in a deadlock with the University.

Marler apologized to the committee that the meeting time period had elapsed without all members being allowed to comment.

HELD IN COMMITTEE

1. Information on Trail Projects ([memo](#)).—Regular Agenda (Marilyn Marler) (Referred to committee: 08/23/2010)
2. Annual tree planting program update. ([memo](#))—Regular Agenda (Renee Mitchell) (Referred to committee: 01/24/11)
3. Discuss the city's strategy to complete a boundary survey of Greenough Park. ([memo](#))—Regular Agenda (Dave Strohmaier) (Referred to committee: 04/04/11)

The meeting adjourned at 10:01 am.