

TAHOE REGIONAL PLANNING AGENCY
FOREST HEALTH & WILDFIRE COMMITTEE

TRPA
Zoom

February 22, 2023

Meeting Minutes

CALL TO ORDER AND DETERMINATION OF QUORUM

Chair Hicks called the meeting to order at 10:10 a.m. on February 22, 2023.

Members present: Ms. Conrad-Saydah, Mr. Bass, Mr. Rice, Ms. Williamson, Mr. Hicks, Ms. Laine.

Members absent: None.

I. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Ms. Williamson moved to approve the agenda as presented.

Motion carried by unanimous voice vote. Chair Hicks deemed the agenda approved as posted.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Ms. Williamson made a motion to approve the November 16, 2022 Forest Health and Wildfire Committee meeting minutes as presented.

Motion carried by voice vote. Commissioner Bass abstained.

III. ELECTION OF VICE CHAIR

Ms. Williamson nominated Ms. Conrad-Saydah to be Vice Chair of the Forest Health and Wildfire Committee.

Public Comment

None.

Ms. Conrad-Saydah elected to Vice Chair by unanimous voice vote.

IV. POSSIBLE RECOMMENDATION ON LIFTING OF THE PROHIBITION ON ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS UNDER CODE SECTION 65.1.6(F) FOR AN APPLICATION FOR A SMALL ON-SITE BIOFUEL UNIT AT THE SOUTH TAHOE REFUSE SITE IN SOUTH LAKE TAHOE, CALIFORNIA

Kat McIntyre, Forest Health Program Manager at TRPA, revisited a previous informational session and proposing a formal recommendation for a biomass energy project. She outlines the

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environmental vulnerability of the forest due to historical fire suppression, dense forest conditions, and the exacerbation of these issues by climate change.

This led to a historical overview of past biomass initiatives, including concerns and regulatory frameworks, followed by Megan Hartman from Wisewood Energy introducing the company and detailing the proposed project. Hartman highlights the focus on a small-scale net-metered Combined Heat and Power (CHP) gasifier technology aimed at offsetting on-site electricity and natural gas usage at Salt Tahoe Refuse (STR).

The presentation delved into an initial environmental and safety impact assessment conducted by Wisewood Energy, discussing fuel demand, transportation impacts, air quality, emissions, and visible smoke during operations. Positive projections include reduced waste hauling truck traffic and associated emissions.

Emphasizing alignment with local sustainability goals, the presenters outline the proposed project's potential as a distributed renewable energy system and its significance in achieving resilient energy. The presentation concluded by detailing the next steps involving further analysis, design refinement, and permit applications, providing a clear pathway for potential implementation of the biomass energy project.

Committee Member Comments & Questions

One member addresses Megan Hartman about the existing facilities in California counties and queries the safety track record of the Plumas facility, which has been operating since 2016 with a different technology—a boiler with an organic ranking cycle, unlike the proposed gasifier at STR. Andrew details Plumas' operations, stating no major issues, though they operate about five months a year due to a ground loop issue during winter.

The discussion then shifts to environmental compatibility and pending applications in Tuolumne and Placer counties. Megan confirms that the Tuolumne system mirrors what's proposed for STR and has passed permitting stages, while Placer's specifics aren't clear. Tuolumne seems compliant with environmental standards, as suggested by the non-significant source status.

The conversation touches on reducing NOx emissions through selective catalytic reduction and potential modeling of truck route impacts. They consider employing technology to reduce NOx by half or further depending on modeling outcomes.

Committee members, including Ms. Williamson and Ms. Laine, raise concerns about the impact on adjacent communities and the need for community engagement. While Wisewood and STR haven't engaged directly with nearby residents, they've collaborated with stakeholder groups like the League to Save Lake Tahoe and the City of South Lake Tahoe.

Further queries revolve around the facility's size relative to energy usage, costs of similar systems, and the possibility of expanding biomass use in the region to meet renewable energy goals. Andrew estimates the core equipment cost at around \$2 million, clarifying the sizing based on energy needs rather than accepting general biomass.

Ms. Conrad-Saydah emphasized the necessity of engaging directly with affected communities for their perspectives. There's recognition that the decision is about whether the agency should accept or lift the suspension for application submission, emphasizing the importance of community engagement once approval progresses. Ms. Conrad-Saydah expressed the

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importance of clarity regarding the proposal's impact on the community, especially within disadvantaged areas where similar refuse facilities traditionally sat. Emphasized the need for clear communication on the decision's implications for potential future citing decisions.

Mr. Bass echoed Ms. Laine's and Ms. Conrad-Saydah's comments, indicating the city's support for the project aligned with climate goals and defensible space needs within the basin. Emphasized the necessity of identifying alternative sites for future projects.

Mr. Rice supported lifting the ban on accepting the application, clarifying that the decision didn't mean project approval but signaled acceptance for application submission. He highlighted the need for public outreach by the city and stressed the importance of community involvement.

Chair Hicks clarified with TRPA General Counsel John Marshall that the committee's decision revolved around whether to accept the application, not approve the facility's permitting. He emphasized the committee's responsibility to ensure the safety and environmental compatibility of such facilities as per Chapter 65.1.6(F) and indicated staff's recommendation supporting the finding.

Chair Hicks stressed the public's future involvement in the approval process, highlighting numerous opportunities for public hearings and expressing opinions before any project approval. He referenced the necessity of biomass facilities post the Andora fire and emphasized the importance of a thorough review aligned with environmental standards.

Ms. Conrad-Saydah made one more point that highlighted that the current decision was solely about determining whether they could proceed with a larger proposal. She emphasized the need for additional information, particularly regarding the site and mitigation strategies. She reassured the public that moving forward would involve extensive discussions, feedback collection, and a focus on ensuring that any proposals would benefit the environment by addressing climate concerns and mitigating wildfire risks.

Public Comment

Ellie Waller reflected on past experiences with biomass proposals, citing the instance in Placer County. She stressed that public opinion wasn't against a biomass facility per se but rather centered on concerns about specific locations, such as near an elementary school and a boys club. Waller urged future applicants to consider alternative sites and emphasized the importance of local context and community outreach.

She appreciated the open dialogue and highlighted financial feasibility as a critical aspect to address when considering such proposals. Waller referred to previous financial troubles with biomass projects and raised concerns about negotiations and cost-sharing, pointing out the need for more comprehensive information moving forward.

Additionally, she acknowledged the need for specific language in the motion to clarify that the decision would lift the suspension for one application only.

Steve Teshara, representing the Tahoe Chamber and Sustainable Community Advocates, supported the action recommended by the staff. He acknowledged the information presented in the staff report and the committee's discussions, stating that it provided a basis for the

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committee to take the recommended action of allowing the application in question to be submitted to the TRPA.

Norma Santiago, representing the South Fork of the American River Collaborative and the biomass working group within the collaborative, expressed support for lifting the suspension on the permitting process. She highlighted ongoing discussions with Wisewood Energy and El Dorado County on similar projects and microgrid development. Norma emphasized technological advancements since the ban in 2012 and the need for further evaluation through the permitting process. She referenced collaborative efforts with Wisewood and the potential for future renewable energy initiatives, aligning with Ms. Laine's and Mr. Bass's earlier remarks about future opportunities in microgrid and renewable energy development.

Alan Miller, a 30-year resident in the Basin, expressed concerns about TRPA's lack of policy development regarding biomass facilities. He emphasized the need for a comprehensive plan rather than piecemeal approaches for such projects. Alan highlighted the suspension of applications as a measure to promote research and urged for substantial scientific inquiry into various technologies and alternatives before approving specific projects. He suggested the adoption of an amendment allowing exceptions for facilities based on thorough research findings and advocated for a more scientifically and technically supported planning framework, emphasizing greater public involvement in decision-making. Alan urged the committee to slow down the process, emphasizing the importance of a well-thought-out plan and public engagement in determining the placement of biomass facilities.

Nick Speal, a South Lake Tahoe resident, expressed gratitude for considering the biomass facility application and highlighted its potential to address wildfire risks and climate change. Nick advocated for a broader suspension of limitations on biomass facilities, encouraging the TRPA to allow other entities to submit applications for similar projects, emphasizing the need for comprehensive evaluation despite the initial consideration.

Doug Flaherty, representing TahoeCleanAir.org, voiced support for efforts to minimize burning in the Lake Tahoe Basin to prevent the addition of phosphorus, nitrogen, and carbon black to the lake. However, Mr. Flaherty highlighted the lack of comprehensive data in the presented proposal, expressing concern about making a decision without adequate information.

If the committee proceeds with the approval, Mr. Flaherty urged the inclusion of an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the specific project, not just an initial environmental checklist, to properly evaluate the potential impacts. He emphasized the importance of considering biomass projects individually and thoroughly assessing their environmental impacts, advocating for caution and a detailed assessment, possibly through an EA.

John Friedrich wasn't able to make a comment and Chair Hicks mentioned that he's been a vocal proponent for this project.

Ms. Conrad-Saydah made a motion to recommend the Governing Board direct the Executive Director to accept an application from South Tahoe Refuse for an on-site small biomass project

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at its collection facility.

Ayes: Mr. Rice, Ms. Conrad-Saydah, Ms. Williamson, Mr. Bass, and Ms. Laine.

Nays: None.

Motion carried.

<https://www.trpa.gov/wp-content/uploads/Forest-Health-Wildfire-Committee-Item-No.-4-Biofuel-Unit-Application.pdf>

V. COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS

None.

VI. PUBLIC INTEREST COMMENTS

John Friedrich couldn't participate due to technical issues while traveling. However, he noted his willingness to engage in conversations regarding biomass for those interested. He highlighted that biomass serves as part of the climate and forest health solution, offering clean, renewable energy compared to pile burning or contributing to wildfires like Caldor Fire. He recognized the technology's advancements over the last decade and welcomed further exploration, emphasizing the positive direction it signifies, and encouraged interested members of the public to reach out for more in-depth discussions.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Williamson moved to adjourn.

Meeting adjourned at 11:20 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



Katherine Huston
Paralegal

The above meeting was recorded in its entirety. Anyone wishing to listen to the recording may find it at <https://www.trpa.gov/meeting-materials/>. In addition, written documents submitted at the meeting are available for review. If you require assistance locating this information, please contact the TRPA at (775) 588-4547 or virtualmeetinghelp@trpa.gov.