



Thursday, October 16, 2025



▲ Hundreds of residents filled the TMHS auditorium during the Energy Facilities Siting Board public hearing. The public hearing is just the third step in a 12-step process to determine if the state will grant local zoning waivers to Hillman Energy LLC to build a lithium-ion battery storage facility in the town. (Paige Impink photo)

# Battery storage public hearing draws frustration

By **PAIGE IMPINK**  
**News Correspondent**

TEWKSBURY — Over 600 people came out to voice their concerns last Thursday night during the public comment phase of the state Energy Fa-

cilities Siting Board's process to grant — or not grant — waivers to the proponents of a lithium-ion battery storage facility. Proposed for an area off of Hillman Street, the area is zoned industrial but abuts the residential

community of Emerald Court and Bayberry Assisted Living, the Great Swamp, and other residences and businesses.

The meeting opened with the Energy Facilities Siting Board explaining the hearing process and a

short presentation by the project proponent.

With no federal representation appearing to speak, the comments moved to state-level elected officials, including State Rep. Dave Robertson and Jack Vitali from

Rep. Vanna Howard's office.

Robertson started by voicing strong opposition to the proposed location, arguing that it is inappropriate for a densely populated neighborhood near the Great Swamp. Rob-

ertson, who serves on the Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities, and Energy, said that while he supports Massachusetts' clean energy transition, the proposal fails to meet local safety and preservation standards.

He and Rep. Howard met with residents from Emerald Court and surrounding streets to gather concerns, which they compiled into a 12-page letter submitted to the siting board outlining four major issues: environmental sensitivity, noise and light impacts, fire safety, and infrastructure limitations.

Robertson cited environmental studies dating back to 2003 calling for stronger protections for the Great Swamp due to prior industrial damage. He also questioned whether the electricity generated would benefit Tewksbury residents.

"We need to know whether this project benefits the public at large or primarily serves private interests," Robertson said.

Comments from John Lombardo of the Economic Development Committee and Melissa Braga of



▲ Sandra Poole was one of many residents who rose to speak about concerns with the project. Wellhead protection, hazardous materials near an ecologically sensitive site such as the Great Swamp, and safety concerns were just some of the issues. In general, residents contend the site, while zoned industrial, is too close to a large number of residents, primarily Emerald Court and Bayberry Assisted Living.

(Paige Impink photo)

the Board of Health were followed by Town Manager John Curran. Curran explained that the town's utmost concern is the safety of the community.

The town is in the process of negotiating a host community agreement with Hillman Energy — a process that is necessary to ensure that if the project is approved, Tewksbury receives as many assurances and protections as possible for public safety. This process is not unusual, despite some residents booing Curran after he spoke.

Based on how host community agreements work, the town is limited in what it can say and must proceed in a manner that protects its position. Asks include funding for consultants, funding for emergency responder training, and funding for a traffic study for a possible traffic light at Archstone Way and Route 38.

The town applied for intervenor status as soon as the proposal came before the Select Board last year. Several members of the board were present at the meeting, but according to member James Mackey, the Select Board has no authority over the approval of the project.

"Our responsibility is to ensure that, if it does move forward, the town is in the best possible position," Mackey told the *Town Crier*.

Resident after resident echoed those safety wor-

ries. One speaker called the proposed site "a disaster waiting to happen," while another pointed out that the area's narrow roads could make mass evacuation "totally impossible" for hundreds of nearby residents, including seniors in assisted living facilities.

"Locating a hazardous battery plant so close to family homes, daycares, and schools is a direct violation of public trust," one resident said. "The community deserves to feel secure without the constant fear of potential disaster."

Another resident emphasized that the site lies within a Zone II wellhead protection area, which is designed to safeguard local water supplies. Under Massachusetts regulations, hazardous waste uses — including lithium battery facilities — are typically prohibited in such zones.

"This would directly contradict the core principles of a wellhead protected area," Sandra Poole said. "It's simply not an appropriate use for this land."

One speaker, however, urged the board to view the proposal through the lens of energy modernization.

"Projects like the Hillman Energy Center are essential to ensuring reliable, affordable energy for the future," the person said, receiving jeers from the audience.

Some residents raised two pending House bills

that address these types of projects. HD 4556 and SD 3224- An Act Establishing Buffer Zones for Battery Storage Facilities, urging the state to hold off on its decision such that it would disqualify the project. In part, the proposed legislation stipulates that no battery storage facility shall be constructed or operated within 2,000 feet of a populated area or within 3,000 feet of an ecologically protected area.

It wasn't until late into the meeting that residents learned that the representatives of the Energy Facilities Siting Board were actually support staff for the board. A collective groan was heard from the crowd. Mackey, who was in attendance, was disheartened by this.

"I would have expected the [siting] board members to represent themselves."

The siting board is expected to continue reviewing testimony and will accept written comments until Oct. 24.

Residents are urged to email [Donna.Sharkey@mass.gov](mailto:Donna.Sharkey@mass.gov) with any and all comments about the project. The town of Tewksbury also has an information page on its website at [www.tewksbury-ma.gov/953/Proposed-Battery-Energy-Storage-System-B](http://www.tewksbury-ma.gov/953/Proposed-Battery-Energy-Storage-System-B).