

**Christine Chesbrough**

**Docket EFSB 25-08**

## **Limited Participant**

### **Introduction**

My name is Christine Chesbrough, and I have been a resident of Tewksbury since 1997. This brief outlines factual concerns regarding the safety, environmental impact, and community effects associated with the proposed lithium battery storage facility. The information presented in this brief is based on testimony provided during the evidentiary hearings and documents submitted to the Energy Facilities Siting Board (EFSB).

I manage a local community Facebook group focused on the proposed battery storage project and have also shared information about the project on other online resident forums. I have also helped collect over 2800 signatures from residents that oppose the facility.

This brief addresses issues related to the facility's location, emergency response and public safety considerations, and potential impacts on nearby residents, schools, daycares, senior housing, and local infrastructure.

### **Site Selection**

During the planning process, four potential sites were considered. However, the site selection was woefully inadequate. Two of the sites were not viable due to there not being enough land to construct the proposed facility. For that reason, these sites should not count towards fulfilling the requirement of viewing alternative sites. However, candidate site 3 on Capital Ave is an adequate site. There are no homes within 1,000 feet and it is not in a Zone II. There is a traffic light on the main road with direct access to Capital Ave and the entire area is Industrial Zoned.

Whereas the proposed site on Hillman St is located in close proximity to multiple residences, daycares, senior housing, assisted living, and local businesses. Within approximately half a mile of the facility are BrightPath and Main Street Learning Academy, two daycares; Emerald Court, a senior housing community; Bayberry, an assisted living facility; several nearby residences, including one located approximately 40 feet from the site; and multiple local businesses. The concentration of residents,

workers, and vulnerable populations near the facility raises concerns about potential impacts in the event of a fire, chemical release, or other emergency. The facility is also adjacent to local roads and infrastructure that could be affected during emergency response or routine operations.

The selection of the current site highlights potential challenges for emergency access, shelter-in-place safety, and the ability of first responders to manage an incident in a densely populated area. Firefighters and other emergency personnel may face restricted access during a hazardous event, increasing risks for residents, workers, and business occupants who may need to evacuate through or across the hazard zone.

The applicant has represented that multiple locations were evaluated and has submitted materials and testimony to the EFSB referencing those alternative sites. However, in response to public records requests, the Town produced only a single email from the applicant's representative, and that communication pertains solely to the subject site. Supporting documentation is included as Attachment A.

No comparable email correspondence at the municipal level was produced regarding the other locations identified in the applicant's state filings.

## **Community Communication and Public Participation**

The Company's communication with the public and certain Town boards, including the Board of Health, was limited during this proposed project. As a result, some residents became aware of the project only after information began circulating through social media, local newspaper postings, or the Town website. Not all residents regularly access these sources, which limited the ability of the broader community to become informed about the proposed project in a timely manner.

An opportunity for all Tewksbury residents to learn about the project was not provided until the EFSB Public Meeting on October 9th. At that meeting, the Company discussed a battery project containing 169 batteries, but displayed an image showing only 134 batteries. During the Evidentiary Hearing, the Company testified that they were aware of the change from Sungrow to Hithium batteries as of September, yet they knowingly misrepresented the project to residents and EFSB staff.

Although discussions between the Company and the Town date back to August 2024, the Company did not appear before the Board of Health until November 2025, demonstrating a clear disregard for the health and safety of Tewksbury residents. During the November 2025 Board of Health meeting, residents asked multiple questions, but the Company's representative was unable to provide substantive answers, repeatedly responding, "I don't know the answer to that question," leaving

many in the audience both frustrated and visibly amused. Many questions raised during that meeting remained unresolved.

Residents, including myself, attempted to contact the Town and elected officials with questions regarding the project. In many instances, responses to emails were delayed or not provided, and requests to meet with Town officials to discuss concerns were not granted. Questions submitted by members of the public were generally answered only once in January 2026 when the HCA was reviewed, and there was a deadline to submit questions. I submitted questions after that deadline and was informed by the Town Manager in an email that they were received well after the deadline. Hillers' credentials speak for themselves.

### **Town Involvement / Neutrality / Lack of Independent Review**

The Town retained a fire safety consultant to review safety concerns; however, no additional independent expert witnesses were engaged to review other aspects of the project. The Fire Expert testified that he never viewed the Site Plan, the Emergency Response Plan nor the Hazard Mitigation Analysis. Any determinations as regards to safety can not be adequately made without thorough review of these documents.

The Town did not turn in Discovery by the allotted time nor did they have a meaningful share in the discovery process.

During the evidentiary hearings, the Town's Attorney questioned only the experts hired by the DiPalma/Sheehan Intervenors and did not question any representatives or experts from the developer's team. The Town's legal counsel appeared only twice in the ten days of evidentiary hearings. As a result, conflicts between data submitted by the developer and information provided by residents or other parties are not independently evaluated in the record. This absence of Town-hired experts, limited cross-examination of the developer's witnesses, and minimal legal participation restricts the availability of neutral, municipal-reviewed analysis on key issues such as environmental impact, siting, and mitigation measures.

### **Town Neutrality and Attorney Funding**

The company, HCA, has indicated that it will cover legal expenses for the Town attorney in matters related to this project. This arrangement raises concerns regarding the Town's ability to act as a neutral party in regulatory proceedings before the Energy Facilities Siting Board. Residents and other participants may question whether the Town can fully represent the public interest when legal representation is funded by the project proponent

## **Safety and Emergency Response Concerns**

The proposed battery energy storage system presents significant safety and emergency response concerns. Lithium battery fires are known to pose risks including thermal runaway, toxic smoke, and difficult-to-control fire conditions. These hazards are particularly concerning given the facility's proximity to nearby homes, daycares, and senior housing.

The HMA and ERP are inadequate. Being a developing technology, each BESS facility is unique. A key component in NFPA 855 is the Hazard Mitigation Analysis. The HMA is a critical component in evaluating the safety of risks of the system.

At the beginning of the Company's draft HMA, we read:

"Further, the contents of this document are in no way meant to address specific circumstances, and the contents are not meant to be exhaustive and do not address every potential scenario associated with the subject matter of the document. Site and circumstance-specific factors and real-time judgment and reason may significantly impact some of the subject matter conveyed in this document. Additional resources and actions, which may be beyond the scope of this document, may be required to address your specific issues"

How can any stakeholder be able to make a determination as regards to the safety of a project with a key component claiming it's 'in no way meant to address specific circumstances'? By definition, the HMA is required to do just that.

The Company throughout these proceedings mentioned several times, they would not be able to provide information due to the plans only being at 30% design. The fact that these plans were submitted 1 year ago and are still only at 30% is a cause for concern. Safety can not properly be assessed when many questions went unanswered because of an incomplete set of plans.

The fixed sensors on the battery units do not test for Hydrogen Fluoride. Testimony was given alluding to firefighters walking around with handheld meters to determine what the Emergency Response would be. Yet no testing was ever conducted regarding how that would take place or if that would even be possible.

The Town has only 14 firefighters on duty during the day and 12 at night, raising serious questions about their ability to both conduct air testing and respond effectively to emergencies simultaneously. In addition to monitoring, these personnel would need to fight any fire, contain a chemical release, and assist individuals who may be exposed, all at the same time. In the event of a fire or hazardous release, local firefighters and

police would face substantial challenges responding to an incident of this nature, including the difficulty of managing such an event within a populated area rather than an isolated location. While a half-mile chemical plume radius has been referenced in discussions, there are numerous residences and sensitive locations within that distance, raising serious concerns about the potential impact on the surrounding community in Tewksbury, Massachusetts.

## **Shelter-in-Place and Evacuation Concerns**

### **Workers in Nearby Businesses**

Workers in nearby businesses, some of which operate solely outdoors, would be impacted before firefighters could arrive. The surrounding offices have second stories. This affects the distance a toxic plume would travel due to its buoyancy. A way to alert and account for these workers was not mentioned in the HMA or ERP. The combination of high-energy batteries, potential thermal runaway, and emergency response limitations creates a heightened risk environment for employees, underscoring the need for strict safety protocols, continuous monitoring, and careful planning before the facility becomes operational.

### **Residents Sleeping at Home**

Residents in nearby apartment complexes and homes, particularly those sleeping at night, could also face extreme risks. Many residences, including Emerald Court and Bayberry apartments, have multiple floors, making ground-level relocation challenging. Elderly residents may have mobility limitations, rely on medications including diabetic medications, or have specific dietary or medical needs that complicate evacuation. Residents with hearing aids or other alert-dependent devices may not be able to receive warnings if they occur at night, further limiting their ability to shelter safely.

### **Parents and Daycare Facilities**

Parents are likely to attempt to retrieve their children from daycare facilities during an incident, creating additional risks for themselves, their children, and first responders. Daycare providers face complex challenges, including caring for infants, managing food and bottles, and handling diapering and other needs while responding to emergency instructions. These practical considerations highlight the difficulties of safely protecting children during a fire or chemical release.

### **Elderly and Vulnerable Residents**

Elderly residents who attempt to leave their homes may put themselves and first responders at risk. Shelter-in-place procedures requiring relocation to ground-level areas are particularly dangerous for residents with mobility limitations, medical needs, or reliance on medications. Many elderly individuals may not be able to use stairs

safely, and some require charging devices such as hearing aids to receive alerts. These factors make emergency relocation or shelter-in-place particularly challenging for vulnerable populations.

## **Shelter-in-Place and Emergency Response Limitations**

HVAC systems must be turned off during an incident, which could create dangerous indoor conditions, especially for infants, elderly residents, and others sensitive to heat or cold. Notification of residents and workers in a half-mile radius presents a serious challenge. There are not enough firefighters to go door to door, and police lack the equipment to reach everyone. The area affected is large, and safe communication and evacuation of all impacted people including workers, residents, and daycare children may not be feasible in a timely manner.

### **Additional Considerations**

The company has stated that shelter-in-place procedures would cover a half-mile radius, and referenced a study estimating wind speeds of 22 mph which represents the 99th percentile. Keven Marr of Hazard Dynamics testified that he chose this to represent the worst case scenario. However, typical storm conditions in the United States can produce higher wind speeds; for example, thunderstorms commonly generate winds ranging from 22 to 55 mph. Actual wind conditions in Tewksbury have exceeded these values on multiple occasions, with residents reporting winds of 45–65 mph. Key locations slightly beyond the half-mile radius include the Town Hall, fire department, schools, preschools, the Blaire House (which provides skilled nursing, rehabilitation, and assisted living services), and nearby low-income elderly housing. Emergency planning should account for these conditions to ensure the safety of all potentially impacted individuals.

### **Chemical Plume Considerations**

An expert from ioMosaic stated that a chemical plume from the facility could extend approximately 2,200 feet and would include hydrogen fluoride (HF) and carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>). CO<sub>2</sub> is more buoyant, and disperses differently than HF, which is heavier and can linger closer to the ground. As answered in an exhibit request, the wall around the facility would bring the plume lower than originally projected. This information highlights how plume behavior may affect residents, workers, and children differently depending on their location and elevation, and underscores the importance of careful emergency planning and protective measures.

### **Traffic and Road Safety Concerns**

The proposed battery facility will require repeated truck deliveries of large lithium batteries, each battery and truck weighing approximately 135,000 lbs. These trucks are planned to access the site primarily via Washington Street and other local residential roads. Many of these roads were not designed for repeated heavy loads, raising the risk of damage such as potholes or structural weakening. Damaged roads could create hazards for residents and their vehicles, and it is unclear who would be responsible if a delivery causes property damage. In addition, increased truck traffic along narrow residential streets may impede emergency vehicle access and create safety risks for pedestrians and neighbors. These concerns highlight the need for a formal traffic and infrastructure assessment before the project is approved to ensure the safety of the surrounding community.

### **Impact on Nearby Area Workers**

There are several existing businesses located close to the proposed facility, and employees at these businesses work outdoors at times. Even though these workers are not part of the battery site, they could be affected by the increased truck traffic, potential hazardous conditions, or emergency incidents associated with the facility. Their presence in the area adds another layer of concern for both safety and planning, as any incident could put these workers at risk and complicate emergency response.

### **Water and Wetland Concerns**

The Hillman site is located entirely within a Zone II/Wellhead protected district. These wetlands drain into the Merrimack River, which serves as a source of drinking water for multiple communities.

The company has conducted studies regarding stormwater at the proposed site and indicated that any chemical release or runoff would require cleanup. However, once hazardous material enters the stormwater system, it can flow offsite through drains and into surrounding areas. Monitoring and containment of stormwater during such events is challenging, and there is no method to completely prevent it from moving beyond the facility.

Any chemical release, fire runoff, or accidental leakage from the facility could potentially enter these wetlands and flow downstream, impacting water quality in at least five towns along the river. This raises serious environmental and public health concerns, as contamination could affect not only the immediate area but also the broader regional water supply. Careful consideration of stormwater management, containment measures, and emergency response planning is essential to protect the Merrimack River and the communities that rely on it.

The proposed Stormwater plan does not allow for self containment. The filtration systems proposed would only allow for solids to be removed, not dissolved chemicals. Stormwater expert Scott Horsley spoke of how since around the batteries is crushed stone, the vast majority of water runoff would go into the ground, not the infiltration facilities. If a proper stormwater design was used featuring a self contained, naturally vegetated system, it would double the amount of land needed for this project.

The Town had the Company reroute the stormwater system due to a bylaw, yet chose not to enforce the 15% impervious surface bylaw that requires a special permit from the Planning Board. On record is the Town Engineer mentioning the need to go before the Planning Board for a Large Land Disturbance permit. The fact that the Town chose to enforce one town bylaw prior to coming before the EFSB yet not two others, questions whether the Company is using this EFSB as a work around of the Tewksbury Planning Board. Ruling on the motion for partial summary judgement regarding preserving Section 5.6 allows for the resident voted on bylaws to help preserve the local drinking water.

## **Community Impact**

The proposed battery facility would be located in an area that currently hosts more than 20 active businesses. Construction and operation of the facility could disrupt these businesses, potentially affecting their operations and leading to loss of jobs or income for employees. These impacts extend beyond the immediate site, as the surrounding community relies on these businesses for services, employment, and economic activity.

## **Public Records Access and Completeness**

I submitted a public records request on November 1, 2025, and was required to file four appeals with the Secretary of the Commonwealth's Public Records Division regarding these records. On March 12, 2026, the Town sent one email attempting to provide access to the records. My daughter was able to access two files on March 13, but when I attempted to access them on March 13 and 14, I could not view any content. I obtained an Outlook account in order to access the records, but this did not allow me to view any files. I also emailed the Town on March 14 regarding these issues, but received no response. On March 17, 2026, a friend identified an alternative website unrelated to Outlook or Microsoft, through which I was able to review some of the records for the first time. We sought to review the records in full in order to see the complete picture on the Town's end.

Upon review, the records appear incomplete. Certain email chains contain missing replies and attachments, some entries appear blank without explanation, and emails from the previous Town Manager are entirely missing. Additionally, no responsive emails were identified for the Select Board Chair or other members of the Select Board, nor for members of the Planning Board or Conservation Commission, while records were produced for the Board of Health Chair and Assistant Chair. The selective nature of the records produced raises further concerns regarding completeness.

The Town was instructed to provide records on a rolling basis beginning in January 2026. Had the Town followed this guidance, the records would not have been consolidated into an extremely large file, and I would have had significantly easier access for reviewing and sharing them. The Town was also instructed to provide a list identifying any withheld or redacted information and the basis for such redactions; however, no such list was provided.

On March 18, 2026, I filed an additional appeal with the Secretary of the Commonwealth regarding the incomplete access and missing information.

The format in which the records were provided is difficult to access and review, and limits the ability to share documents except through screenshots. Due to these access limitations and the timing of availability, I was unable to provide the records in a usable format to other Limited Participants. These issues raise concerns regarding the completeness and accessibility of the record produced.

## **Conclusion / Summary**

The proposed battery energy storage facility presents significant safety, emergency response, environmental, and community risks. These include potential fires and toxic smoke, challenges for first responders, threats to wetlands and the Merrimack River, impacts on nearby businesses and workers, and disruptions to local roads and infrastructure. Given the complexity and scope of these concerns, it is essential that the project undergo an independent review with fully considered mitigation measures.

Equally important is ensuring transparency and full access to all relevant public records. The difficulties encountered in obtaining complete records, including missing emails, attachments, and redaction information, have limited the ability of Limited Participants to fully evaluate the project and its impacts. Full access to these records is critical for a fair, thorough, and informed review of the facility's potential risks and impacts on the community.

## Attachment A

**From:** Tyler Rynne <[trynne@eastpointenergy.com](mailto:trynne@eastpointenergy.com)>  
**Sent:** Thursday, August 29, 2024 4:04 PM  
**To:** Alexandra Lowder <[ALowder@tewksbury-ma.gov](mailto:ALowder@tewksbury-ma.gov)>  
**Subject:** Hillman Energy Project - East Point Energy

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**Caution:** This email originated from outside of the organization. **Do not reply, click links, or open attachments** unless you can confirm the sender and know the content is safe. When in doubt, contact your IT Department.

Hi Ms. Lowder,

Thanks again for talking this morning about the energy project we are exploring at 73 Hillman St. As I said, I will be in town and am free all of September 18<sup>th</sup> to meet to introduce myself and our project.

Feel free to send an invite for any time that works for you!

Best,

Tyler



**Tyler Rynne** (He/Him)

Project Developer

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