

Tewksbury battery project approved with over 100 conditions following resident pushback



Approval for a controversial battery storage project in Tewksbury came Tuesday, despite months of opposition from neighbors who say it doesn't belong near their homes.

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Though, after months of testimony and public comment, the Energy Facilities Siting Board voted to approve the project.

"Profound disappointment because I just feel that there are so many unanswered questions," Tewksbury resident Sandra Poole said.

Neighbors have argued the lithium-ion battery facility raises serious concerns about fire safety, environmental impacts, and its proximity not only to the hundreds of seniors at Emerald Court, but also a resident who lives just a few feet away.

Though, despite project approval, not all is lost for the residents against the project.

Tewksbury town manager, John Curran, says residents banding together led to over 100 conditions being implemented in the newly approved proposal.

"The act of participation by the community, not just the town, made this a much better decision and a much better agreement for the town," Curran said.

During the review process, chair of the siting board, Jeremy McDiarmid, said they made several changes to the proposal which are meant to strengthen safety, emergency planning, and oversight of the facility.

"That decision that we issued has conditions to protect the public's health, to make sure that noise, that storm water, fire safety are all taken into account as the project is being designed, built and operated," McDiarmid said.

The company behind the project, East Point Energy, has maintained that the project is safe and needed to strengthen the electric grid.

The company's VP of Project Development Maggie Howe provided the following statement:

"Battery energy storage systems like Hillman Energy Center help to support a more reliable and affordable electric grid. We thank the Energy Facilities Siting Board (EFSB) for running a smooth and transparent process and welcoming helpful public feedback. Today's decision to approve the zoning exemption will allow Hillman Energy Center to deliver meaningful benefits to the Town of Tewksbury, and we look forward to continuing our collaboration with the EFSB, town officials, and community members as we pursue the next round of approvals for this important project."

While Tuesday's vote clears a major hurdle for the project, many residents say they aren't giving up and will continue exploring their options as construction moves one step closer to becoming reality.