

Westfield Councilor drafts resolution opposing lithium battery storage

- Updated: Dec. 11, 2024, 6:01 a.m.
- [Amy Porter | The Westfield News | \[aporter@thereminder.com\]\(mailto:aporter@thereminder.com\)](#)
-

WESTFIELD - During public participation at the City Council meeting Dec. 9, Councilor Dan Allie spoke about the Department of Public Utilities hearing at Westfield State University on Dec. 5 to consider exempting Jupiter Power, LLC. from the city's zoning regulations for a lithium battery energy storage system on Medeiros Way. He also announced his intention to make a motion to have the Council consider a resolution opposing the project.

Allie said insufficient notice of the hearing was given, sent two days before Thanksgiving and scheduled for a night that the City Council normally meets. He thanked Council President John Beltrandi and "every councilor who voted to reschedule our regular meeting," so councilors would be able to attend.

"At the beginning of the hearing, the DPU commissioner stated the goals of the process were transparency, clean energy and environmental justice. However, the scheduling did not give sufficient notice to Westfield residents or city councilors and calls into serious question just how transparent this process is," Allie said.

He said during the hearing, he asked one question - in the event of a fire, would fire-fighting foam be used. He said he received a one word answer from the company lawyer, which was "no."

"I specifically mentioned fire-fighting foam, because I knew nothing could be used to put out a fire in a lithium battery storage unit. Any fire would become a catastrophic event, and must be allowed to burn itself out, usually taking at least 48 hours. In one case a fire lasted 16 days requiring 8 million gallons of water to be poured around the container to keep the fire from spreading to surrounding containers," Allie said.

"Why would anyone living in Westfield want to place a lithium battery storage facility over the aquifer, when a catastrophic fire, lasting for days, [could] release large amounts of smoke and toxic pollution including PFAS into our air, and millions of gallons of water into the ground," he added.

Allie said there is little tax benefit to the city and no benefit to residents or to the Westfield Gas & Electric, since Westfield has its own electric supplier. He thanked Mayor Michael McCabe, Fire Chief Patrick Egloff and Thomas Flaherty, CEO of Westfield Gas & Electric for expressing their concerns, and Councilors Karen Fanion and Kristen Mello who spoke against the project at the hearing.

Several other people also spoke against the project during public participation. Among them was Jessica Britton of Westfield, who said she attended the hearing at Westfield State. She called the project "not a left or right issue; a human issue. Every living thing needs water."

Britton said the proposed location of the battery park is directly above the city's aquifer.

"We are in grave danger with what they want to shove down our throats figuratively and literally," she said.

Ralph Thresher of Westfield said when a lithium storage facility in the town of Easthampton, New York, caught fire, the town was told to evacuate for one mile in the direction of the wind. He said the community was misled that the facilities were clean, and the owners failed to disclose that PFAS are essential components in lithium batteries.

Thresher said it took 2.2 million gallons of water to extinguish the fire, all of which flowed into the aquifer. He said it was the first of the owner's four facilities to catch fire in two months.

West Springfield City Councilor Frederick Connor also spoke against the project. He said he wanted to express his concern from a regional standpoint to a facility that would pose an unacceptable risk to drinking water.

“It is astonishing to me that the DPU of Massachusetts would embrace this project,” Connor said, listing the “inordinate” risk of pollutants such as hydrogen fluoride, hydrogen chloride, and others, all of which could be released at various stages during manufacturing, use, recycling and disposal. He said if a fire should occur and aqueous fire-fighting foam used, that would further contaminate the site.

Connor said concerned citizens of Westfield and surrounding communities should be consulted, and a site chosen that would pose less risk.

At the end of the council meeting, Allie made a motion to have the City Council consider drafting a resolution strongly opposing the construction of the lithium battery storage system, refer it to the Legislative & Ordinance Committee and the Law Department, and vote on it at the next City Council meeting on Dec. 19. He said the vote needs to be made by Dec. 20 in order to send it to the DPU within its comment period. Allie said it has to be moved into committee and out again by that meeting.

William Onyski, chair of L&O, asked Allie to send him a draft resolution by the end of the week.

Bridget Matthews-Kane thanked Allie for making the motion. “I was at the meeting, and already submitted my own letter to DPU as an individual councilor. We derive no benefit and take all the risks,” she said, adding that she would eliminate the wording in Allie’s draft about never having one in Westfield. “If correctly sited, there may be a benefit,” she said.

Allie said the draft resolution was just a suggestion or guideline.

Also expressing support for the resolution was Nicholas Morganelli.

Mello then spoke for the first time during the meeting. “Thank you to everyone who said the words PFAS and aquifer tonight and it wasn’t me. I am so proud of everybody,” she said.

During his comments at the start of the meeting, Allie said a video of the hearing is on the DPU YouTube channel at [youtube.com/watch?v=7HKIKVc4Qbo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7HKIKVc4Qbo). He said the portion for public comment begins at 38 minutes.

The deadline for public comment is Dec 20. To submit, comments on this project must be filed with the department by email or email attachment to dpu.efiling@mass.gov and to

donna.sharkey@mass.gov no later than close of business on Dec. 20. Include name, title and telephone number to contact in the event of a question.