



In the City Council, July 11, 2024

Upon the Recommendation of Councilor Marissa Elkins and Councilor Deborah Klemer*

24.113 A Resolution in Support Of An Act Relative to the Future of Clean Heat in the Commonwealth and An Act Establishing a Moratorium on New Gas System Expansion

WHEREAS: Massachusetts has a mandate to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050, requiring that buildings, which are responsible for one-third of all climate-damaging emissions, must stop burning carbon-based combustible fuels, fossil fuels, such as “natural” gas, which is 95% methane; and

WHEREAS: The City of Northampton has adopted a Climate Resilience and Regeneration plan upon which the City is committed to becoming net carbon neutral for city buildings by 2030 and for the entire city by 2050; and

WHEREAS: The Mayor of Northampton, has taken significant steps toward meeting these goals by establishing a new Climate Action and Project Administration Department and allocated climate stabilization funds to transition the City to renewable energy; and

WHEREAS: The Northampton Energy and Sustainability Commission, is charged with advising and assisting the City in identifying, developing, implementing, and managing programs and policies for achieving energy efficiency and energy resource sustainability, and guard against effects of energy resource disruption/depletion and climate change in all of Northampton's public and private sectors; and

WHEREAS: Large methane pipeline system expansions, such as the Eversource Western Massachusetts Reliability Project in Springfield, are currently being proposed in Massachusetts, waste resources that are needed for the transition; and

WHEREAS: Geo-thermal technology is already being used to replace the burning of carbon fuels with cleaner, safer non-combusting renewable energy using heat pumps to heat and cool our buildings; and

WHEREAS: Under the current Massachusetts Gas System Enhancement Program (GSEP), gas companies will continue to spend billions installing new replacement methane pipes; and

* The sponsors acknowledge with gratitude the advocacy on this issue of the Northampton chapter of Mothers Out Front and Chapter Coordinator Denise Lello.

WHEREAS: Under the GSEP, ratepayers would be paying off the new replacement pipes for 50 years, long after they have been retired, placing a burden on ratepayers and wasting resources that are needed for the transition to non-combustible fuels; and

WHEREAS: Advanced leak repair is vastly less expensive than replacing pipes and is safe and effective at controlling leaks; and

WHEREAS: The transition off methane cannot be achieved by individual action alone, because households with means will switch to heat pumps, leaving lower income households to shoulder the burden of maintaining the entire system; and

WHEREAS: The transition requires a strategic plan to retire the gas distribution system neighborhood by neighborhood, replacing it with non-combusting energy and planning to improve the grid with more powerful wires/reconductoring on existing poles all of which should be planned to be accomplished through rate basing and equity-based structures to support transition for low-income residents; and

WHEREAS: Northampton is committed to moving off methane and doing so in a fair and equitable manner.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED: That the Northampton City Council supports pending legislation S.2105 and H.3203, An Act Relative to the Future of Clean Heat in the Commonwealth, and S.2135 and H.3237, An Act Establishing a Moratorium on New Gas System Expansion; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: That the Northampton City Council supports the creation of a strategic plan for an equitable transition for a neighborhood-by-neighborhood transition from methane to clean heat, provided either through air source heat pumps or through thermal energy infrastructure such as networked geothermal and a plan for bolstering electric grid infrastructure; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: That the Northampton City Council supports the Department of Public Utilities to lead the planning process for a phased transition off methane to clean electrical and thermal energy, and, in consultation with the City, to transition with least cost and disruption and with equity and affordability for all;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: That the Northampton City Council supports a transition that includes:

- Using advanced leak repairs where appropriate, prioritizing the largest volume leaks, to reduce or eliminate emissions for a decade or more until a pipe can be retired or transitioned,
- Retiring gas pipes by street segment or neighborhood, prioritizing leak-prone pipes, while moving the connected customers to renewable, non-carbon-emitting, non-polluting alternatives; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: That the Northampton City Council urges National Grid and Eversource to work with the City to plan and implement a pilot networked geothermal project in our city; and

the City to plan and implement a pilot networked geothermal project in our city; **AND BE IT FURTHER**

RESOLVED:

That the Clerk of the City of Northampton send a copy of this resolution to the Governor Maura Healey, Senate President Karen E. Spilka, House Speaker Ronald Mariano, each member of the legislative delegation for the City of Northampton: Senator Jo Comerford, and Representative Lindsay Sabadosa, EEA Secretary Rebecca Tepper, and DPU Chair James M. Van Nostrand.

In City Council, July 11, 2024

Adopted in Final Reading on Roll Call Vote of 8 Yes, 0 No, 1 Absent (Councilor Maiore)

Attest: Launa Krutzger, Clerk of Council

Rules suspended, passed final reading and enrolled.

I hereby certify that the above Order was adopted by the Northampton City Council on July 11, 2024

Per Charter Section 3-6, non-binding resolutions are not required to be presented to the Mayor for approval.

Attest: Launa Krutzger, Clerk of Council