

CONSERVATION COMMITTEE REPORT

May 11, 2011
9:05–10:00 am
140 West Pine Street

Members Present: Pam Walzer, Bob Jaffe, Renee Mitchell, Dave Strohmaier, Dick Haines, Cynthia Wolken, Ed Childers, and Lyn Hellegaard

Members Absent: Marilyn Marler (chair), Jon Wilkins, Stacy Rye

Others Present: Ben Schmidt, Tom Javins, Mathew Koehler

I. ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS

A. Approve minutes.

Minutes of May 4, 2011 were approved as submitted.

II. FINAL CONSIDERATION AGENDA ITEMS

III. CONSENT AGENDA ITEMS

IV. REGULAR AGENDA

1. Update on the [University](#)'s efforts to install or utilize biomass fuel to generate energy on campus. ([memo](#))—Regular Agenda (Dick Haines) (Referred to committee: 04/25/11) (**HELD IN COMMITTEE**)

Dick Haines – the purpose of the referral is not to generate approval or disapproval but to provide information to the public, who want more information regarding the project as there is concern for air quality, noise, impact on infrastructure.

Tom Javins, (Project Manager for bio mass project) provided the committee with an explanation of how a biomass boiler operates as well as a summary of the project. The bio mass boiler is being installed to meet the goals of University of Montana's Climate Action plan. The UM's target goal is to have a 10% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2015 and to be carbon neutral by 2020.

This is a part of the action plan to replace a major source of greenhouse gas emissions with a wood fired biomass boiler. The proposed boiler, which will be built on the east side of an existing heating plant, would burn an estimated 17,000 to 20,000 tons of wood a year instead of using natural gas. Fuel for the boiler will consist mainly of logging residue such as treetops and limbs, and also might use beetle-killed trees and trees from thinning projects. Using biomass as a fuel produces air pollution in the form of carbon monoxide ([NOx](#) nitrogen oxides)

Javins – there will be limited neighborhood impacts with two truckloads of [hog fuel](#) a day delivered to campus in an enclosed tractor trailer. The fuel would be unloaded using a moving floor to unload into an eleven foot deep storage area. The system is capable of burning chips, pellets or hog fuel. The fuel will be delivered at 20-50% moisture content to keep down the dust and any grinding will occur off site. Using dispersion modeling the 100 foot stack would be above any low inversion and does not appear that moisture will be a problem.

Cynthia – a review of the permit application indicates there will not be much greenhouse gas emission reduction? Why will this be greener?

Javins – the actual total carbon dioxide will be higher than natural gas, but it is coming from sustainable natural resources rather than fossil fuel. It may be possible to see a decrease in air quality in the valley as modeling for air quality is complicated, stack emissions will be higher but air quality should improve especially in the area of the heating plant.

Dave – I understand the goal to reduce carbon foot print, but not sure I am willing to trade air quality for that goal, and not sure this plan gets us to a reduction in greenhouse gases. What environmental analysis has the project gone through, and where are you in the permitting process?

Javins – the air quality permit is one of the environmental processes and ensures we meet all regulations. You can't start construction without this permit and the project must meet national and state air quality standards. Right now we are in the air quality process with the application

being reviewed and a draft permit will either be issued or denied. MEPA – requires consider all aspects of a project that would have impact on area. Started that process with public forum in December and then responded to the comments and held another meeting to kick off MEPA process. There is a thirty-day comment period. We hope to have a draft of the environmental impact document released soon and there is another 30 day comment period on the draft document. The document is to provide direction for design of the system, and indicates if any significant impacts must be mitigated.

Javins gave his phone number 243-2127 to call for questions on the project.

Ben Schmidt asked Javins to explain the NOx control project.

Javins - NOx is a term describing nitrogen oxide, and is a precursor to particulates. The goal would be to reduce NOx.

Ben – any time there is combustion it is common to have NOx which is a pollutant of concern. In 2010 the standards for NOx was changed to protect public health through the Clean Air Act. It is our responsibility to look at that which can be a precursor to ammonia nitrates. The major source of NOx in Missoula is cars. ([Missoula City-County Health Department Permit Process](#))

The wood biomass boiler is fairly clean burning and this would be one or two generations above standard wood boiler.

Pam – how does this compare to natural gas use, and impact?

Ben – in purely looking at emissions and not stack height, wood will produce higher emissions than a gas boiler. Depending upon stack height there may be less pollution.

Bob – I am interested in seeing this go forward but have some concerns regarding the degradation of air quality, and increased rather than decreased greenhouse gas emissions. It does sound like it will meet air quality standards but that there is potential for a decrease of air quality. It does have other positive aspects as related to economics. What are the implications for creating a need for wood products, will it reduce hazard fuel, and is there enough of a quantity available to have a positive economic impact?

Javins – the project will allow about five new or current jobs with the University hiring one more full time operator. According to the studies there is adequate amount of fuel available for current timber operations in the five county areas around Missoula. Dependent upon current and future logging and timber operations the projections are for around 30-47,000 tons available and this project would use about 15,600 tons yearly. We would anticipate in the next five year using trees harvested due to beetle kill.

Bob – how does proposed development of Smurfit-Stone play into your project?

Javins – we are basing our decision on current knowledge not the possibilities related to that project.

Public comment:

Mathew Koehler – Executive Director Wild West Institute – there is an ad hoc group formed and have tried to obtain information related to the basic questions of costs and emissions and logistics of this project. It has been difficult to get information from the UM. As the Missoulian reported when looking at the air quality permit, the project will not reduce emissions but will produce twice as much and release three times as much particulate. Also the current boilers are out of compliance.

Mr. Koehler went on to discuss and read excerpts from emails he had obtained from the University related to the project and expressed his concern with the information. He encouraged Council and citizens to ask question and for the Health Department to be tough and he saw no reason for a 16 million project with added maintenance and increased emissions while risking air quality.

Walzer pointed out the Council does not have any control over the project and it was requested to hold the item for future discussion.

HELD IN COMMITTEE

1. Information on Trail Projects ([memo](#)).—Regular Agenda (Marilyn Marler) (Referred to committee: 08/23/2010)
2. Annual tree planting program update. ([memo](#))—Regular Agenda (Renee Mitchell) (Referred to committee: 01/24/11)
3. Discuss the city's strategy to complete a boundary survey of Greenough Park. ([memo](#))—Regular Agenda (Dave Strohmaier) (Referred to committee: 04/04/11)

The meeting adjourned at 10:05 am.