

From: [Jim Snyder-Grant](#)
To: [Board of Selectmen](#)
Cc: [Green Advisory Board](#); [Matthew "Selby"](#)
Subject: Natural gas line request for Sep 19, 2016
Date: Monday, September 05, 2016 10:39:42 AM

At your meeting on September 19, 2016 you are scheduled to consider a request from National Grid to extend a gas line from 142 Pope Road to 134 Pope Road to supply natural gas to a newly built home there.

I'm writing you to ask you to say no to these sorts of requests, because it's time to stop adding new infrastructure that locks in additional global warming—causing fossil fuel use for many decades. Do I expect you to say no this time? Not really. I recognize this would be a big and abrupt change in your policy. Instead, it's time for the Town to take steps to have these decisions about methane ("natural gas") pipelines become thoughtful decisions based on information and policy, instead of automatic approvals.

1. Please ask staff to develop some information on “greener” alternatives to natural gas technologies. The Town could proactively educate developers, realtors, potential home buyers, and residents about these options, and could let it be known that that's the direction toward which Acton's Master Plan — and the Town's commitment to lowering greenhouse gas emissions — tell us to head, and that greener energy sources are a Town priority.
2. Please tell the Engineering and Building departments to tell new customers that gas line requests are no longer being approved automatically. Residents are speaking against them, and there are preferred options (see #1). A “moratorium” on gas line connections to new houses, until there is a policy in place, is a step worth considering.
3. Please schedule time this autumn to discuss policy on new natural gas infrastructure. With some heads-up, staff, committees, community groups (such as Green Acton), and residents can develop more-extensive information for you to consider. The public might well like to have input on this discussion.
4. Have public hearings, as you would with any new policy shift.

Members of Green Acton have come before the Board before to ask you to say no to new gas pipeline. In November of 2015, Debra Slmes and I gave this testimony:

<http://next.greenacton.org/category/issues/energy/natural-gas-infrastructure/local-infrastructure/>

To summarize our main points:

- Natural gas, primarily composed of methane, is a potent greenhouse gas, many times worse than carbon dioxide in its impact on global warming.
- Every time we bring gas to a new house in Acton, we lock in another natural gas user, typically for decades.
- Methane escapes into the air during both production and distribution; as the volume of leaking NG is studied further, the estimated rate at which gas escapes into the air increases.
- Natural gas creates other problems besides greenhouse gases: fracking, the source of much of the new supply of natural gas, is poisoning the air and water, and destabilizing geological structure in places where it is allowed.
- Good alternatives exist for electric heating and hot water now, via greatly improved heat-

pump technology.

What's the bigger policy picture here? Here's a simplified version of a general plan to eliminate fossil fuel use from homes:

- a. reduce energy use with efficient appliances, better insulation and air sealing
- b. switch remaining energy use to electricity
- c. switch electricity generation to renewable sources

The state and the town have taken decent policy steps on (a) and (c), but are far behind on (b). First step is to stop adding new fossil fuel users. I don't expect any existing residential gas user, including myself, to take the financial hit of switching over from gas to electricity right now. Personally, I'm waiting for my heating system to require some expensive repair before switching over. Cost of operation is much less with heat pumps than with natural gas, but the initial capital cost is a barrier. From a policy point of view, the state and utilities have good rebates for air-source heat pumps, but more than rebates will be needed for the bulk of current natural gas users to switch over. An effective carbon tax+dividend system that increased the price of natural gas — to match the future costs of climate change that fossil fuels are responsible for — would also move a number of users over to electricity.

The Supreme Judicial Court recently explained to the Commonwealth that the targets of the Global Warming Solutions Act are legally binding, and that the Commonwealth is not doing enough to meet these goals. At the same time, July had the warmest global mean monthly temperature ever recorded. Time is running short and we need to do whatever we can.

Thanks for considering how to have a policy for natural gas connections that pays attention to our responsibility to the future.

-Jim Snyder-Grant
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Some links that may be helpful:

The state's view of the Global Warming Solutions Act (GWSA)

<http://www.mass.gov/eea/air-water-climate-change/climate-change/massachusetts-global-warming-solutions-act/>

Some initial legal analysis of what it means that the Supreme Judicial Court has ruled that the GWSA targets are binding:

<https://bostonbarjournal.com/2016/08/24/sjc-rules-state-must-set-annual-greenhouse-gas-emissions-reductions/>

Methane ("natural gas") contributions to global warming compared to coal:

<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/fact-or-fiction-natural-gas-will-reduce-global-warming-pollution/>

<https://grist.org/briefly/natural-gas-is-passing-coal-as-source-of-greenhouse-gas-emissions-in-the-united-states>

Estimates of rates of methane leakage are hard to get, and mostly changing upwards:

<http://www.eenews.net/stories/1060029141>

Heat pumps with mini-splits

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/business/2014/10/05/new-heat-pump-technology-can-warm-homes-even-cold-new-england-winters/JgABf7wNFqRcYI6YVN6nsl/story.html>

Incentives available for heatpumps and split distribution systems.

<http://www.masscec.com/learn-about-air-source-heat-pumps>

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