

# Background Materials – June 9, 2025 – Planning Board Meeting

Prepared by Anne Capra, Director of Planning and Conservation, 6/6/25

**Cable Access Channel 15** –The Cable Studio has indicated that this meeting will be live streamed on Channel 15.

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**Background Reports for all Planning Board meetings** are posted online:

<https://www.southhadley.org/1274/Agenda-Background-Materials>

## AGENDA ITEM #1 Open Comment Period

This 10-minute period is set aside for the public to offer comments on items not on the posted agenda, in accordance with the adopted policy, as amended 9/11/23, posted on the Town of South Hadley Planning and Conservation Department webpage here:

<https://www.southhadley.org/DocumentCenter/View/11705/Policy-on-Open-Comment-Period---As-Adopted-2023-09-11>

**Action Needed:** Allow members of the public to offer comments to the Board.

## AGENDA ITEM #2 Minutes

Planning and Conservation Coordinator Colleen Canning will forward minutes separately.

**Action Needed:** Vote to approve the minutes.

## AGENDA ITEM #3 Correspondence

Correspondence is attached.

**Action Needed:** No action needed.

## Public Hearing

### AGENDA ITEM #4 36 Bridge Street Special Permit – Mixed use Development

Application online: <https://www.southhadley.org/1395/Bridge-St-36---Redevelopment>

The current application as well as the Special Permit Decision issued in 2020 are online here.

## Summary Background

This application is for the reissuance of a Special Permit previously issued in 2020 to Luis Builders for the construction of a mixed use building containing 675 sq.ft. of commercial space and three (3) one-bedroom apartments and two (2) two bedroom apartments. Additional project elements include parking, landscaping, utilities and stormwater management systems. The first floor residential space will be handicapped accessible. The Special Permit expired and the property is being sold to the current applicant, Mael Walkowiak. The applicant states that he is seeking to build the project exactly as previously permitted, with the exception of and changes to the building construction and materials that may be required due to updates to the Building Code. The Order of Conditions #288-459 issued by the Conservation Commission remains current.

The property is generally described as a 0.293 acre tract of land located on the north side of Bridge Street (Route 116) and identified on Assessor's Map 5C, Parcel 21, generally across the street from the Police Station. The property is located in the Business B zoning district and is within the South Hadley Falls Overlay District and the South Hadley Falls Smart Growth Zoning District. The property is currently vacant, with the original building having been demolished in 2015 after being condemned and sold through a tax title sale to Luis Builders. The applicant is not proposing to use the South Hadley Falls Smart Growth Zoning District provisions but is requesting some dimensional and parking waivers which are allowed by right of being within the South Hadley Falls Overlay District. Business B allows multifamily subject to Special Permit, and allows retail and office use by Site plan Review. In this instance, the applicant is applying for the Special Permit for multifamily use and incorporating the commercial space into the site plan for the Special Permit.

### **Waivers Requested**

The South Hadley Falls Overlay District (255-45) purpose "is to encourage the redevelopment of South Hadley Falls in a manner that is consistent with its historic urban pattern by allowing greater flexibility of uses and relaxing certain other requirements that have been obstacles to redevelopment within this district." 255-45E(3) permits waivers: "An applicant for any approval may request, and the Planning Board shall grant, waivers from any of the otherwise applicable dimensional, landscaping, and parking requirements in the underlying district, provided that the applicant can demonstrate that the requested waivers are more in keeping with the existing character of the South Hadley Falls area than the underlying zoning would permit. The Planning Board may adopt design and dimensional guidelines to guide applicants and the Board in its decisions to grant such dimensional waivers."

The applicant has requested two waivers:

- Waiver from Section 255 Attachment 2 dimensional requirement for a 6 foot side yard setback in the Business B zoning district. They have proposed a 3' setback which locates the new building at the same setback as the original building which was demolished. *This waiver was granted in the 2020 Special Permit.*
- Waiver from the Section 255-86 requirement for off-street parking. The standard is 1.5 spaces per dwelling unit and which would be rounded up to 8. The commercial space (office or retail) would be required to have 2 or 3 spaces based on the following standard:
  - 4 spaces per 1,000SF of enclosed floor space, excluding space used for storage (retail and personal services)
  - 3 spaces per 1,000SF of floor space (office)

The mixed use space would be required to have 10-11 off street parking spaces. The applicant is proposing 8 spaces behind the building. Section 255-86F reiterates the allowance for a waiver pursuant to 255-45 in that it provides that the *requirements of this 255-86 may be waived by the Planning Board based upon a showing that they are inappropriate or otherwise unreasonable under the provisions of 255-45, South Hadley Falls Overlay District.* This waiver was granted in the 2020 Special Permit.

### **Stormwater Management**

The final approved site plans from 2020 included a rain garden and extensive landscaping with native vegetation within the rear of the property which is also within the 200' Riverfront Area to Buttery Brook. This system underwent extensive review by the Conservation Commission and MassDEP in 2020, and as noted above, the OOC #288-459 is active. The 2020 Special Permit Decision required a Performance Guarantee to be set for the stormwater system. It is recommended that requirement also remain a part of any new Special Permit, if granted by the Board.

I have requested that the applicant submit updated operation and maintenance plans for the stormwater system as well as for trash, snow plowing, landscape care, etc.

### **Department Comments**

DPW, John Broderick, via email 5/20/25 - The existing 6" PVC sanitary sewer connection will be adequate for this project. No additional concerns from DPW

Water District 1, Jeff Cyr via email 5/20/25- No further discussion has been held with us based on previous comments. There will be improvement fees due to the Department based on the final design. If the design is staying the same, a total of 4 improvement fees would be required for a total of \$8,000.00.

Fire District 1, Chief Stark via email 5/20/25 - The only concern I have is the egress from 34 Bridge Street. There needs to be an exit egress area for that unit for safety concerns. A concrete or paved sidewalk would be acceptable. I believe the building inspector will speak on this as well.

*NOTE – This has been advanced to the Building Commissioner. In 2020, the egress at 34 Bridge Street was determined to be illegal. The Special Permit Decision acknowledges this concern and states as a condition that it must be corrected to the satisfaction of the Building Commissioner.*

SHELD, Matt Delmonte via email 5/20/25 - Comments are the same as in 2020: SHELD engineer stated due to the width of the driveway, the electric meter bank will likely have to be on the back side of the building. If they were installed on the driveway side of the building, they would be exposed to vehicular damage.

BOH, Sharon Hart via email 6/2/25 - For stormwater, require no standing water within 72 hours. BOH must witness perc test.

Historical Commission, Robert Judge, via email – The Historical Commission has no comments.

**Recommendations:** Review the 2020 Special Permit Decision, inclusive of findings, and determine if there are any substantive changes, new information, or other about the project. Use the 2020 permit

findings as a guideline for the Board’s discussion.

<https://www.southhadley.org/DocumentCenter/View/12479/Special-Permit-Decision---Bridge-Street-36---APPROVAL---2020---As-Filed-with-Town-Clerk?bidId=>

**Action Needed:** The Board needs to conduct the public hearing, review and discuss the project, accept public comment, and make a finding on each of the standards for special permits as identified in 255-129, issue a decision on the two requested waivers, identify any Special Conditions, and discuss conditions for a Performance Guarantee for the stormwater management system.

## AGENDA ITEM #5 Business A-1 Design Guidelines

Final revised design guidelines online here:

<https://southhadley.org/DocumentCenter/View/14148/BUS-A-1-Design-Guidelines---5222025---FINAL>

Business A-1 Mixed Use Developments Zoning background: <https://southhadley.org/1482/Business-A-1-Design-Guidelines>

A public hearing was held on 5/19/25 on the draft design guidelines. Innes Associates made several edits to the guidelines as requested by the Board. The final version is now posted online. The Board needs to vote to adopt the guidelines.

### RECOMMENDED MOTION:

I move to adopt the Business A-1 Design Guidelines as revised 5/22/2025.

**Action Needed:** The Board needs to vote to adopt Business A-1 design guidelines.

## AGENDA ITEM #6 Discussion of Agricultural Uses Zoning Bylaw Amendments & Sign Bylaw Amendments

Agricultural Uses Analysis Report and Proposed Amendments & Sign Bylaw Analysis Report and Proposed Amendments: <https://www.southhadley.org/1318/ProposedDraft-Bylaws>

The Board will begin discussion of both on 7/14/25. There is a lot of information related to both so I have posted the reports and proposed amendments well in advance to give everyone time to read these. No further action is needed tonight.

## AGENDA ITEM #7 Subdivision Regulation Updates and Consultant for Subdivision Regulation Appendices

A Request for Quotes was issued on 5/12/25 for “Landscape Design Planning Services for Subdivision Regulations”. The scope of work includes completing appendices for the Subdivision Regulations including drafting typical street cross sections and intersections details and diagrams, and creating a recommended tree and shrub planting guide. All work is to be completed by September 30, 2025. Proposals were due last week and six proposals from qualified professionals were received. The selected consultant is Registered Landscape Architect Kate Cholakis-Kolysko for a contract price of \$15,700. Draft materials will be circulated to the Board in the coming months for review, and final

appendices completed by 9/30/25. Thereafter, I anticipate the full update to the Subdivision Regulations will be ready for scheduling a Public Hearing in October. The schedule previously presented to the Board suggested a hearing in September but as previously discussed, it would be preferable to have the regulations fully completed for a hearing.

**AGENDA ITEM #8**

**Planning & Conservation Department Report on Planning Projects and Development Updates**

**A. MHC Energy Center Site Plan Review**

The College has submitted a request to withdraw their application at this time. They have revised their timeline for phasing in the Energy Center’s geothermal hub and have moved it out 1 to 2 years. Therefore, at the 6/23 public hearing continuation, the Board will vote to grant their request for withdrawal.

**B. Next Planning Board Meetings and Other Important Dates**

*Planning Board typically meets the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Mondays of the month.*

<b>6/1/2025</b>	<b>Business A-1 Mixed Use Permitting Moratorium Expires - Design Guidelines Adoption Due</b>
<b>6/16</b> <i>Special Meeting</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anthony’s Dance Club Special Permit Public Hearing continuation</li> </ul>
<b>6/23</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MHC Energy Center Site Plan Review Public Hearing continuation – <b>REQUESTED WITHDRAWAL OF APPLICATION</b></li> <li>• 88 Willimansett Street Special Permit Public Hearing</li> <li>• Route 202/33 Corridor Re-Zoning and Design Guidelines Discussion w/ Innes Associates</li> </ul>
<b>7/14</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Route 202/33 Corridor Re-Zoning Discussion (Board only)</li> <li>• Agricultural Uses Zoning Bylaw Amendments – Board discussion draft report</li> <li>• Sign Bylaw Amendments – Board discussion draft report</li> </ul>
<b>7/28</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Route 202/33 Corridor Re-Zoning Draft Zoning and Design Guidelines– Public Listening Session</li> <li>• Curb cut bylaw/policy</li> </ul>
<b>8/11</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Route 202/33 Corridor Re-Zoning Draft Zoning and Design Guidelines – Board discussion/final edits</li> <li>• Open Space and Recreation Plan 10-year Action Plan Review</li> </ul>
<b>8/25</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agricultural Uses Zoning Bylaw Amendments – Board discussion draft report</li> <li>• Sign Bylaw Amendments – Board discussion draft report</li> </ul>
<b>9/8</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Route 202/33 Zoning Public Hearing - (Special November Town Meeting Warrant)</li> </ul>
<b>9/22</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Route 202/33 Zoning – Final Edits &amp; Draft Report to Town Meeting</li> <li>• Agricultural Uses Zoning Bylaw Amendments – Public Hearing</li> <li>• Sign Bylaw Amendments – Public Hearing</li> </ul>

<b>10/6</b> <i>Columbus Day</i> <i>10/13</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Route 22/33 Zoning – Approve Report to Town Meeting</li> <li>• Agricultural Uses Zoning Bylaw Amendments – Final Edits &amp; Draft Report to Town Meeting</li> <li>• Sign Bylaw Amendments – Final Edits &amp; Draft Report to Town Meeting</li> </ul>
<b>10/20</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agricultural Uses Zoning Bylaw Amendments – Approve Report to Town Meeting</li> <li>• Sign Bylaw Amendments – Approve Report to Town Meeting</li> <li>• Subdivision Regulations Public Hearing</li> </ul>
<b>November 5th</b>	<b>Special Fall Town Meeting</b>

AGENDA ITEM #9 Other New Business (topics which the Chair could not reasonably expect to be discussed/considered as of the date of this notice)

No additional business has been submitted to me as of the date of this notice.

**SOUTH HADLEY PLANNING BOARD  
LIST OF CORRESPONDENCES  
JUNE 9, 2025 REGULAR MEETING**

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**Letters and Memos**

- May 16 letter (attached) from Denise Presley, 19 The Knolls, regarding applicability of the Dover Amendment for the Mount Holyoke College Energy Center Site Plan Review application and associated May 22 Town Counsel guidance (attached).
- May 20 email (attached) from Martha Terry, 25 Brainerd Street, sharing an article published in the Hampshire Gazette regarding the Mount Holyoke College Energy Center Site Plan Review application.
- May 20 email (attached) from Tom Lake, 30 E Red Bridge Lane, regarding the Mount Holyoke College Energy Center Site Plan Review application.
- May 23 email (attached) from Michelle Bertrand, 472 N. Brookfield Rd Oakham MA, regarding construction of a Battery Energy Storage System to be located at 358 Coldbrook Rd, Oakham MA.

**Legal Notices**

*Amherst*

- Notice from the Amherst Planning Board for a public hearing on June 4 to consider an application for site plan review filed by the Town of Amherst to construct an accessible walkway, and other site improvements, at 1046 South East Street.
- Notice from the Chicopee Planning Board for public hearing on June 5 to consider the following: 1) waiver from frontage to subdivide property and create a new reduced sized single-family building lot and leave the existing house on a reduced lot at 34 Wildermere Street; 2) zone change from Business A to Residential B to allow most appropriate use of the existing structure by aligning with the zoning definition of ‘hospital’ on Chicopee Street; 3) zone change from Business A to Residential B to allow most appropriate use of the existing structure by aligning with the zoning definition of ‘hospital’ at 11 St. Anthony Street; 4) zone change from Business A to Residential B to allow most appropriate use of the existing structure by aligning with the zoning definition of ‘hospital’ at 546 Chicopee Street; and 5) zone change from Residential A to Residential B to allow two new single-family building lots to retain the existing house on a separate lot at 100 Beaumont Ave.

*Chicopee*

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*Granby*

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*Hadley*

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*Holyoke*

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# DENISE PRESLEY

May 16, 2025

South Hadley Planning Board  
116 Main Street  
South Hadley, MA 01075

Dear Planning Board Members,

Mount Holyoke College ("MHC") seeks your approval to construct an unmanned power plant at 9 Woodbridge on a lot they own in the Residence B zoning district. Currently, the lot abuts residential apartment buildings, a church, and the outdoor play area of a children's day care center is less than 500' away. Ordinarily, such an industrial use of land in this area would be prohibited. However, MHC takes the position that its power plant is exempt from our zoning laws under MGL C40A, Sec. 3 (the "Dover Amendment") because "...it is part of the educational institution's campus facility." This is an erroneous interpretation of the law.

It's true the Dover Amendment can be used to exempt educational uses of land from local zoning bylaws. But its application has limits. Here, the law protects only MHC's use of its land that have as their bona fide goal something that can reasonably be described as educationally significant. Moreover, the educationally significant goal must be the *primary or dominant purpose for the use of the land*. Whitinsville Retirement Society, Inc. v. Town of Northbridge, 394 Mass. 757 (1985) (An "element of education" does not satisfy the dominant and primary educational purpose required for protection under the Dover Amendment.). And, in Trustees of Tufts College v. City of Medford, 415 Mass. 753, 757 (1993) the Court held "Local zoning requirements...which serve legitimate municipal purposes sought to be achieved by local zoning, such as promoting public health or safety, preserving the character of an adjacent neighborhood, or one of the other purposes sought to be achieved by local zoning...may be permissibly enforced, consistent with the Dover Amendment, against an educational use.

In light of the foregoing controlling case law, MHC must show that the primary or dominant use of the power plant is for an educational purpose. So far, they have not. It's my understanding MHC does not make a PILOT to the Town. But their proposal to construct an unmanned power plant largely ignores significant risks to the health, safety and welfare of abutting residents and little kids. Presumably the plan is to shift the burden for addressing those legitimate concerns to the Town - post construction.

It seems to me the Planning Board has two ways to address this matter:

1. Reject MHC's application for a site plan approval pursuant to: (a) documents and information it submitted to the Board between February and April 2025; (b) a troubling March 17<sup>th</sup> report describing significant geo-technical issues; (c) the testimony of its representatives in public hearings; and (d) an industrial power plant in a residential district is a plainly impermissible use of the lot.

2. Issue an interim decision based on a finding that the project is prohibited under existing zoning law; and invite MHC to formally present its justification for a Dover Amendment exemption. In other words, reject the application but provide MHC a reasonable opportunity to detail how the proposed power plant satisfies the 'dominant or primary educational purpose' our courts require for exemption from the Town's zoning laws. This approach negates any later argument that the Town acted arbitrarily, capriciously or in manifest disregard of the law.

Thank you for your consideration.

Very sincerely,

/s/ Denise L. Presley

Attached: South Hadley GIS map of the affected properties

See also:

<https://www.southhadley.org/DocumentCenter/View/14007/MHC-Energy-Center---Geotechnical-Report> (dated 3/17/2025)

Please Note: Pg.6, Sec. 4.0 SIGNIFICANT GEOTECHNICAL ISSUES, and Pgs. 14-15, Sec. 6.0 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



axisgis.com/South Hadley MA/  
(9 Wood bridge St)



Mead, Taleran & Costa, LLC  
Attorneys at Law

227 Union Street  
Suite 606  
New Bedford, MA 02740  
www.mtclawyers.com

**MEMORANDUM**

To: Anne Capra, AICP, Town Planner  
Lisa Wong, Town Administrator

From: Lisa L. Mead, Esq., Per C. Vaage, Esq.-Town Counsel

Date: May 22, 2025

Re: Mount Holyoke College Energy Center Site Plan Review

Reference is made to the above-captioned matter. In that connection, we have reviewed the materials provided by the applicant as well as the legal opinion of third-party counsel, as to the issue of whether the proposed development falls within the protections of the Dover Amendment (M.G.L. c. 40A, § 3) as part of an educational use. For the following reasons, we believe that the proposed development is subject to Dover Amendment protection, and that the opinion that the proposed structure alone must have as its primary and dominant use an educational purpose reads the Dover Amendment too narrowly.

The facts as we currently understand them are that Mount Holyoke is a private, non-profit college, and owns the property on which the development, alternatively described as an Energy Center, is proposed, and that the locus is part of a larger number of parcels comprising the Mount Holyoke College campus.

Under G.L. c. 40A, § 3, “[n]o zoning ordinance or by-law shall ...prohibit, regulate or restrict the use of land or structures ... for educational purposes on land owned or leased by .... a nonprofit educational corporation; provided, however, that such land or structures may be subject to reasonable regulations concerning the bulk and height of structures and determining yard sizes, lot area, setbacks, open space, parking and building coverage requirements.” *G.L. c. 40A, § 3*. To fall within the protections of the Dover Amendment, the focus is whether the property “is operated primarily for an educational purpose”. *Whitinsville Retirement Society, Inc. v. Town of Northbridge*, 394 Mass. 757, 760 (1985) (quoting, *Cumington School of the Arts, Inc. v. Assessors of Cumington*, 373 Mass. 597, 603 (1977)).

The Appellate Courts in Massachusetts have recognized that accessory structures, even if not located on the physical campus of the educational institution, or are ancillary to the primary use as an educational institution, are protected uses,

*Newburyport Office*  
30 Green Street  
Newburyport, MA 01950

*Millis Office*  
730 Main Street, Suite 1F  
Millis, MA 02054  
Phone/Fax 508.376.8400

subject only “to reasonable regulations” under G.L. c. 40A, § 3 and its predecessor. *See, Radcliffe College v. City of Cambridge*, 350 Mass. 613, 618 (1966) (analyzing predecessor statute, “[p]roviding for the parking or housing of the automobiles of students, instructors, and employees of an educational institution is within the broad scope of the educational powers of the institution just as is providing for the feeding and housing of such personnel. These are secondary functions to the main educational purpose”); *Commissioner of Code Inspections of Worcester v. Worcester Dynamy, Inc.*, 11 Mass.App.Ct. 97, 99 (1995) (off-campus dormitory in residential district entitled to Dover Amendment protection).

The common theme is that an institution must show not only that the activities on its property serve an educational purpose, but also that the educational purpose is primary over the other purposes on the property. *Regis College v. Town of Weston*, 462 Mass. 280, 288 (2012). “In categorizing uses of land under the zoning act, courts have traditionally sought to determine *the principal use of an establishment* ‘viewed in its totality’”. *Regis College*, at 290. (emphasis added). “Once identified, that principal use rather than any subsidiary use generally controls determinations of the property’s consistency with zoning ordinances”. *Id.*

Here, it is likely not disputed that Mount Holyoke College is a non-profit educational institution, and that the principal use of the property which it owns in South Hadley is educational. Applying that standard, as a legal matter, regardless of whether the proposed development is characterized as a geothermal hub or a power plant, the proposal is a subsidiary use to the primary use of the property for educational purposes. As a practical matter, one reaches the same conclusion. It would be illogical to withhold Dover Amendment protections to certain elements of a college campus which are not literally used for academics (e.g. dormitories, parking areas, power generation, maintenance facilities, public safety buildings, health care center, etc.), while the *primary* use of the property as a whole is educational.

For these reasons, it is our opinion that the proposed development falls within the protection of the Dover Amendment, subject to reasonable regulations concerning bulk, height, lot area, setbacks, open space, parking and building coverage requirements as contemplated under G.L. c. 40A, § 3.

I hope you find this summary helpful. Please let me know if you have any questions or require any further information.

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## Fwd: for the Planning Board and the Associate

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Anne Capra <acapra@southhadley.ma.gov>  
To: Colleen Canning <ccanning@southhadley.ma.gov>

Please add to the Board's correspondence for the next meeting.

----- Forwarded message -----  
From: **Martha Terry** <marthaterry25@gmail.com>  
Date: Tue, May 20, 2025 at 7:48 AM  
Subject: for the Planning Board and the Associate  
To: Anne Capra <acapra@southhadley.ma.gov>

Dear Anne,

Please distribute this article from today's Gazette newspaper to members of the Planning Board and the Associate.

I just received a request to forward this article to the Planning Board.

Thank you.

Martha Terry

SOUTH HADLEY — Mount Holyoke College's proposed site for a new Energy Center on Woodbridge Street — a key piece of a long-range plan to increase campus — is drawing criticism from residents who worry that noise and potential gasoline fumes from the power plant will impact their health and quality of life.

"I'm a Mount Holyoke graduate and I grew up on campus," Woodbridge Street resident Melissa Gagne told the Board of Health at a public hearing last week. "I love Mount Holyoke, but I don't love what they're doing in town."

Mount Holyoke has already begun production of its \$180 million geothermal system on its property, which includes 200 wells below the rugby field, in heating pumps under Kendade Hall. The geothermal plant will not create its own electricity, but rather source energy from the South Hadley Electric Light and Power Company.

While most of the system will be located on campus, the proposed site for the Energy Center, which will house most of the system's heating and chilling equipment, is located on 7 Woodbridge St.

Residents in the neighborhood, specifically those who live in the apartment building across from the proposed site, expressed apprehension about a geothermal system that could cause fumes seeping into the building from contaminated soil.

"I remember that it was a gas station and a bicycle shop, and there was contaminated soil. They cleared some of it, but not all of it," resident Sandra Zeigler said. "I will be spewing up from the ground into the building and out of the building. That concerns me immensely."

According to a report conducted by O'Reilly, Talbot & Okun Associates Inc., the site underwent a 10-year remediation process to clear about 990 tons of contaminated soil. The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection declared that the college, which owned the site, achieved a "permanent solution."

However, engineers recently found contaminated soil samples from 10 feet below where the building would be constructed. While it's unlikely that water vapor from the soil will migrate into the new building and nearby structures, the report found.

"The migration of soil vapors into the proposed building could potentially result in a risk to building occupants," the report reads. "Therefore, to mitigate the risk of soil vapors, we recommend that a subsurface venting layer be installed beneath the new building slab."

Gagne, who lives at the apartment complex on Woodbridge Street, said she's worried that the toxic fumes will further irritate her chronic health issues.

Rita Petithory, who lives in the same building, added that the Center Church preschool classes use an outdoor playground near the site, and Steven Marlborough runs a geothermal plant possibly emitting fumes and noise in the center of town.

"It's really the noise, the toxic VOC [volatile organic compounds], the excessive decibels we will hear as 12 people living in our building, plus other people in the neighborhood," Petithory said.

Mount Holyoke College acknowledged both the remediation efforts and the decision to add a subsurface venting system in a statement. The decision, the college said, is a "worst-case" scenario that vapors will enter the building.

"We are in the early stages of the Energy Center project, an important component of the College's transition to geothermal energy, and appreciate the community's input. The site was selected based on a combination of technical feasibility, environmental conditions and logistical considerations."

Residents also discussed possible noise bylaw violations when the building's propane backup generator runs. A sound study conducted by Salas O'Brien & Associates found that noise levels do not exceed ambient sound levels, but the propane backup generator exceeded the noise ordinance on every property line. In addition, residents noted that noise levels were higher during high-traffic hours.

"They were relying on vendor data for what the decibels would be for various pieces of equipment, air handling and what it would be on the roof," Joanne Gagne said.

The next hearing on the project will take place during a June 23 Planning Board meeting.

Emilee Klein can be reached at [eklein@gazettenet.com](mailto:eklein@gazettenet.com).

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Anne Capra, AICP  
Director, Planning & Conservation  
Town of South Hadley  
116 Main Street | South Hadley, MA 01075  
(413) 538-5030 x6128  
[acapra@southhadleyma.gov](mailto:acapra@southhadleyma.gov)

**Learn more about South Hadley's community plans [HERE](#).**

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## Fwd: Mt Holyoke Geothermal Hub

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**Anne Capra** <acapra@southhadleyma.gov>  
To: Colleen Canning <ccanning@southhadleyma.gov>

Wed, May 21, 2025 at 8:41 AM

Please add to the Planning Board's correspondence for the 6/23 hearing.

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Tom Lake** <tomlake61@gmail.com>  
Date: Tue, May 20, 2025 at 3:38 PM  
Subject: Mt Holyoke Geothermal Hub  
To: <letters@repub.com>, <shart@southhadleyma.gov>, Anne Capra <acapra@southhadleyma.gov>  
Cc: Therien Nate <natetherien@gmail.com>

There is a very vocal group of South Hadley residents determined to stop change in general to South Hadley. Their claims against the Mt Holyoke Geothermal Hub don't stand up to reasonable scrutiny.

Their claim that because it will have backup generators that makes it "an electric power plant" which would ruin our air quality 24/7 is patently false. Our municipal Electric Utility is extremely reliable. In the last 14 years power has gone down over 24 hours only once.

Their claim that the structure will not fit into a residential neighborhood is also misleading. This is no quiet residential street. The location is on a busy street, next to a brick church and across from the Post Office, an old apartment building and the fire station. Implied in this is that an "industrial building" would be out of place, but that maybe if the Geothermal Hub were housed in a faux residential building that would somehow be preferable. This may be a matter of personal taste, but I venture that if a poll were taken of South Hadley residents that most would prefer a bold showcase for energy efficiency at Mt Holyoke College versus hiding it in a phony facade.

Respectfully

Thomas Lake

[30 E Red Bridge Lane, South Hadley MA 01075](#)

413-315-3733

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Anne Capra, AICP  
Director, Planning & Conservation  
Town of South Hadley  
116 Main Street | South Hadley, MA 01075  
(413) 538-5030 x6128  
[acapra@southhadleyma.gov](mailto:acapra@southhadleyma.gov)

**Learn more about South Hadley's community plans [HERE](#).**

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## **battery proposal in Oakham**

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**Michelle Bertrand** <mbertrand.oakham@gmail.com>

Fri, May 23, 2025 at 12:43 PM

To: acapra@southhadleyma.gov, SHPlanBoard@southhadleyma.gov, selectboard@southhadleyma.gov

Dear Town Officials:

### **Have you heard that your drinking water is in danger?**

My name is Michelle Bertrand and I live in Oakham, Massachusetts. You may have never heard of this town. Oakham has a population under 2,000 people and is located in Central Massachusetts, 14 miles Northwest of Worcester. The surrounding area is the watershed for the Ware and Chicopee rivers and the water is pumped into the Quabbin and Wachusett Reservoirs, the two largest bodies of water in the state supplying drinking water to over 3 million people in the MWRA, including Boston. No one in their right mind would want 296 29 foot lithium battery storage containers over such a large water resource.

Oakham is in a struggle against Rhyndland Energy/Moraga Storage, Department of Public Utilities (Energy Facilities Siting Board), and Maura Healey. Maura Healey who violated the Massachusetts Home Rule Amendment by allowing companies like Rhyndland/Moraga to file with the Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities' newly formed Energy Facilities Siting Board for an exemption of the Town of Oakham zoning bylaws and Water Resource Protection to allow construction of a 180 MW Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) to be located at [358 Coldbrook Rd. Oakham, MA](#).

As a citizen, affected by this proposed project, I want to bring awareness to other communities that could potentially be affected. It is reasonable to assume (in the past five years, there have been approximately 10-20 BESS fires per year), a large fire with thermal runaway will happen. As seen in January 2025 at the Moss Plant in California which burned for five days and had a toxic plume of smoke that traversed over 20 miles. This would carry heavy metals, toxic contaminants, and carcinogens into the Ware River Water Supply and potentially the Quabbin and Wachusett Reservoirs, devastating the water supplies for the Boston Metropolitan area, surrounding towns, and resident's private wells. The only 2 proven methods to stop thermal runaway in a lithium-ion battery is 1. Let it burn itself out and 2. Using large amounts of water over an extended period, Oakham has an on-call fire department with no town water supply, only pumper trucks to haul water to the fire. However, both processes can lead to toxic plumes and hazardous runoff, carrying toxic and dangerous substances.

These companies are For Profit. Massachusetts residents have already seen a surge in their electricity costs. These increases are due to a combination of factors including the rising delivery fees, with some residents seeing their bills double or even triple in cost.

I am asking you and your community for support and to help spread the word. The people of Oakham, Everett, and every town facing these dangerous facilities need your help. Legislators have filed bills to 1. Pause siting lithium battery storage sites (Bill HD.4558 <https://malegislature.gov/Bills/194/HD4558>) 2. Require buffer zones between battery storage sites and communities or ecologically fragile areas (Bill HD.4556 <https://malegislature.gov/Bills/194/HD4556>) , and 3. Mandate local engagement in permitting, rather than allow state agencies to approve on their own (Bill HD.4557 <https://malegislature.gov/Bills/194/HD4557>),. These were filed by State Rep. Kelly Pease out of 4th Hampden.

As individual communities and a state as a whole, we need to gather together and let our political leaders know that our voice matters and we will not stand for a potential disaster in which we all suffer. Please view these pages about our statewide problem from Fiscal Alliance Foundation and concerned citizens.

[UPDATE-Oakham, Massachusetts: Residents Pushing Back Against Lithium Ion Battery Storage Facility](#)  
[Oakham, Massachusetts: Residents are Fighting a Dangerous Lithium Ion Battery Storage Proposal](#)  
[Let Them Eat Pizza](#)

Thank you,

Michelle Bertrand

[mbertrand.oakham@gmail.com](mailto:mbertrand.oakham@gmail.com)

472 N. Brookfield Rd.

Oakham, MA 01068

774-757-7888