



NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION

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From: Wellesley Natural Resources Commission
To: Corey B. Testa, Staff Director, Representative Alice Peisch, Members of the Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities and Energy
CC: Wellesley Natural Resources Commission, Senator Cynthia Creem, Senator-Elect Becca Rausch
Submitted: 12/7/2018

Wellesley Natural Resources Commission Testimony to the Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities and Energy December 11, 2018

The Wellesley Natural Resources Commission (NRC) is a five-member elected board with broad responsibility for our town's conservation land, parks, and natural resources. The NRC is also the Tree Warden for the Town of Wellesley.

We are deeply concerned about the issue of gas safety and gas leaks, given what we know to be the dangers of methane emissions for human health, for global warming, and for our public shade trees. We urge the Telecommunications, Utilities, and Energy Committee to support legislation that would allow utility companies to seek innovative ways to address the challenge of this failing infrastructure, to incentivize a shift to renewable sources of energy, and to mandate a decrease in methane emissions.

Meanwhile, the presence of dozens of gas leaks -- and National Grid's inability to make progress in reducing their number -- is undermining Wellesley's town-wide efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and mitigate our town's impact on climate change. What progress we've made is seriously compromised by uncontrolled methane emissions from dozens of persistent gas leaks throughout the town.

For more than a year, the NRC has been working to better understand the issue of gas leaks and the extent of the problem in Wellesley.

- In March 2017, the NRC organized a public forum on gas leaks, co-sponsored by Senator Cynthia Creem, Senator Richard Ross, Representative Alice Peisch, the Board of Selectmen, the Board of Health, the Sustainable Energy Committee, and non-profit group Sustainable Wellesley.

- In July 2017, we commissioned a study of methane readings in the Town of Wellesley by Bob Ackley of Gas Safety Inc., whose findings suggest that there are many more gas leaks in Wellesley than the approximately 200 that have been previously identified by National Grid, including a number of leaks in close proximity to public schools, private schools, and pre-schools.
- In May 2018, we partnered with parents from the grassroots group Wellesley Green Schools to bring these leaks to the attention of the School Committee and asked them to address the problem with National Grid. We also made sure that the School Committee was aware of a significant leak — that is audibly hissing — directly behind the Wellesley High School on Seaver Street, and another in front of WHS that registered 95 percent methane content on the combustible gas indicator. The School Committee then wrote to National Grid asking for National Grid’s plan for remediating these leaks.

As far as we know, none of these activities has resulted in any action by National Grid — and it is our understanding that the leaks near Wellesley High School and other Wellesley schools remain. We feel urgent action should be taken to address the dangers posed by this failing infrastructure.

To be clear, we felt this sense of urgency *before* the catastrophic gas explosions in the Merrimack Valley. The fear of potential explosions is now added to what we already know about the dangers posed by our current failing gas system: We know that when children are exposed to significant methane leaks they are at a greater risk for asthma and other dangerous health conditions. We know that methane is at least 80 times more potent as a greenhouse gas than carbon. We know that gas leaks are contributing to the untimely death of our public shade trees.

We are counting on the Legislature and other state leaders to address the problem of failing gas infrastructure and its impact on health, safety, and our environment.

For the Commission,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. Schmitt', written in a cursive style.

Brandon Schmitt, Director