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New Jersey Energy Master Plan Public Hearing – Hackensack, NJ

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The Meadowlands Regional Chamber has long been an advocate for both the regional economy and for a strong quality of life here in the Greater Meadowlands of New Jersey. We represent close to 1200 companies and 150,000 employees and our organization has been a strong vocal supporter of both economic developments balanced with environmental reclamation across all of New Jersey.

I appreciate the opportunity to present comments as it pertains to this important policy matter.

In our review of the Energy Master Plan elements, we want to focus on Energy Efficiency, Power Transmission, Power Generation and the continued strengthening of the utility infrastructure here in New Jersey as all those elements impact our ability to grow and sustain a strong economy.

Energy Efficiency:

The Draft 2019 Energy Master Plan acknowledges that electric and gas utilities are mandated by the Clean Energy Act (CEA) to reduce electric and gas consumption by 2% and 0.75% respectively. These goals must change the State's energy efficiency landscape going forward.

Utilities have several unique advantages in delivering energy efficiency programs to customers. They have established customer relationships, expertise administering energy efficiency programs, the ability to offer on-bill repayments, and they have access to usage data identifying energy savings opportunities that monitors the impact of energy efficiency projects.

We support utilities to serve as the lead implementers of energy efficiency programs such as PSE&G's Clean Energy Future. Utility companies possess unique advantage's which includes the success and prevalence of the utility-led model across the United States, especially with the CEA's mandate for the utilities' role in energy efficiency. We also believe the time to act on energy efficiency is now, so that New Jersey can do its part to combat the climate change crisis.

The fact is, helping customers reduce energy usage is critical to lowering emissions. Without cost-effective energy efficiency program's it will be difficult to achieve the CEA's stated goals.

Electric Transmission:

Transmission enhancements are expected to reduce costs to customers by increasing access to cheaper power. Continued investment in the regional transmission system will enable a shift to a more reliable energy supply and help further reduce carbon emissions. Utilities such as PSEG should be commended for its role and investment in upgrading electric transmission in NJ.

Nuclear:

The recent approval for the Zero Emission Certificate (ZEC) program by the BPU will help ensure the viability of emission-free electric generation. Continuing generation of nuclear power is critical to the Clean Energy Goals set by the EMP. The ZEC program preserved the Hope Creek and Salem 1 and 2 plants, which provide more than 90% of the state's carbon-free electricity. Until other renewable energy sources can be successfully built, implemented and proven to have the capacity to meet energy needs in New Jersey, Nuclear power generation remains a critical element.

Natural Gas and Utility Infrastructure:

Natural Gas is an important fuel to help wean the state off the heaviest polluting fuels, such as coal. Natural gas should be used as a bridge fuel; however, we need to be mindful of the risks associated with phasing out the use of this cost-effective resource that provides fuel diversity. For example, the abundance of natural gas has helped reduce the cost of energy production significantly, to the great benefit of New Jersey consumers. Furthermore, in light of the relative availability of low-cost natural gas and the primacy of gas use in business and home heating, it would be imprudent to neglect the state's gas delivery infrastructure.

I draw your attention to recent news reports in New York where the utility company has ceased all new gas connections for businesses and homes. This presents a clear danger to any long-term economic development initiatives the state will embark upon. Any signs that New Jersey cannot meet the demand of manufacturers and businesses relocating to New Jersey will cause them to look to other states. New Jersey must approach this energy master plan with strategic planning and realistic common sense. The diversity of energy generation must be preserved. Using the latest in technological advances to ensure cleaner energy generation should be leveraged to the fullest.

New Jersey should also continue to support utility companies in upgrading and modernizing its energy delivery systems. Those upgrades in recent years have had a cumulative reduction of tens of thousands of tons of CO2 equivalent and reduced the loss of natural gas and methane emissions leaking from aging infrastructure into our environment. Those upgrades have also had a significant impact on safety.

Solar and Wind:

New Jersey should continue its quest to increase solar and wind electric generation. The state's utilities have an important role to play in the continued success of the solar market in New Jersey, with a focus on customer and market segments where clean energy investments are lagging and provide a strong support for environmental justice concerns.

There is additional opportunity for utility participation in public and municipal solar, landfill and brownfield sectors where thousands of acres of land still sit dormant, and for community solar in the urban low and moderate income sector, where utilities can reach those customers that have been left behind in the solar market's rapid expansion over the past decade.

Advanced Metering Infrastructure:

The draft EMP appropriately acknowledges Advanced Metering Infrastructure "AMI" as the "foundation component of a modernized distribution grid" and a "prerequisite of many additional clean energy objectives". We agree that the Board should issue "recommendations to utilities for accelerated AMI installation in a strategic, coordinated, and efficient manner so the state can begin realizing the benefits of a connected grid while also containing costs".

In closing, I commend the Board of Public Utilities for listening to the concerns of all stakeholders. We at the Meadowlands Chamber believe our advocacy as commented here is balanced, pragmatic and can produce good public policy that will benefit and strengthen New Jersey's future.

Thank You.

James Kirkos