

Atlantic City council backs wind farm plan despite major opposition

By Lynda Cohen | Wednesday, September 18, 2024

Things got heated at the Atlantic City Council meeting Tuesday night, as dozens turned out to oppose an offshore wind plan they fear will wreak havoc on the city and its natural resources.

City Council President Aaron “Sporty” Randolph started off the public portion already upsetting those who had planned to speak.

Since there were so many people, he decided to cut the time limit from three minutes to two, as many gathered said they had timed their comments under the three minutes that are the common limit at any public meetings.

Things only went downhill from there.

Architect Brooks Garrison had given each councilmember a report showing them the issues, including that the cable is set to go right down Sovereign Avenue School, with the dig expected to take about a year, with Pete Pallitto Field the construction hub.

But City County Vice President Kaleem Shabazz focusing on the fact that Garrison has used the city seal in his report, giving the impression that it was an official city document.

While Garrison apologized for his “mistake” — noting that he had fixed it and redone the report — it continued to be brought up by Randolph and Business Administrator Anthony Swan.

Randolph also took offense with many in the audience applauding and cheering certain speakers, noting that it was a council meeting “not a football or baseball game.”

Many who live in the Fifth Ward — where the project would run through — were especially upset.

At the last meeting, their then- Councilman Muhammad "Anjum" Zia abstained from a vote concerning the project, likely knowing he was about to be ousted due to a judge ruling he did not live in the city.

Muhammed Huq was voted in to temporarily fill the position Wednesday, after the judge changed his ruling to leave the position unfilled until a special election.

He wound up the deciding vote to back presenting the project to the Department of Environmental Protection.

Councilman Jesse Kurtz tried to table the vote a month, but that failed by a 6-3 vote.

In the end, council approved the resolution 5-4, with Kurtz, and fellow Councilmembers George Tibbitt, LaToya Dunston and Bruce Weekes voting no.

"It is a disgrace that as his first vote, Mohammed Huq threw the residents of the Fifth Ward under the bus," said Maria Lacca, who will challenge him in the special election. "This totally reckless vote shows that he is more beholden to outside forces and refuses to stand up for the people of the Fifth Ward."

In a statement sent to BreakingAC, Lacca said the project "will literally tear up the Fifth Ward for two to three years and close Pete Pallitto Field for just as much time.

"During construction, the drilling and excavating equipment used by the developers will reach 117 decibels – similar to the level of sound generated by a jet engine only 50 feet away," she added. "How anyone claiming to represent the Fifth Ward can vote for this project while knowing the harm it will cause to the neighborhood and not even consider alternate routes is totally unacceptable."

In a shock to many Wednesday night, Weekes announced it would be his last meeting as a councilman.

He said he is making a career change that impacts his ability to serve. He would not say what the upcoming changes are, but told BreakingAC he would be making the announcement Friday morning on Scott Cronick's Off the Press on WOND.



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