

Panel wants planned fuel plant to cut emissions

[Sandi Hoover](#)

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Proponents of a biomass fuel plant planned for south Carson City will have to find a way to cut emissions in half or scrap their plans.

In a 3-2 vote, with Shelly Aldean and Robin Williamson opposing, the Board of Supervisors voted Thursday to uphold a planning commission decision to issue a special-use permit to APS Energy Services.

But the motion included a stipulation that the company cut by 50 percent the amount of particulates that would be released into the air over Carson City.

In casting his vote, Mayor Marv Teixeira said that even though supervisors weren't recognized experts in the fields of air quality or renewable energy, they were charged with representing and protecting the residents of Carson City.

"We really don't know what the hell we're doing, but we want to do the right thing here, and if you don't like my vote, that's just the way it is," Teixeira said.

More than 40 residents packed the Sierra Room in the community center Thursday.

"I'm opposed 100 percent to this project. All the mitigation in the world isn't going to stop the pollution. What is it doing for Carson City?" said Janet Johnson.

The state wants to build an energy plant that burns chipped wood to generate electricity and heat water for the 1,200-inmate Northern Nevada Correctional Center on Snyder Avenue. Excess energy would be sold to Sierra Pacific Power Co.

The \$6.4 million renewable energy project also has been touted as a way to save space in Carson City's landfill by turning dumped wood, such as pallets, into a fuel source. Other fuel would come from the Lake Tahoe basin as part of efforts to improve the forest's health.

The Carson City Planning Commission approved a special-use permit for the plant in May, but residents appealed the decision last month.

Jason Woodbury, a lawyer representing them, told supervisors Thursday that the proposal had "one fatal flaw."

“We are not out to kill this project. Renewable energy is the way this state and the country are moving. We have a problem with emissions, specifically particulate matter,” he said.

Woodbury said the plant would emit 253 pounds of the fine dust every day.

“Over the 25-year life of this project, 2.3 million pounds will be pumped into Carson City’s air,” he said.

Woodbury also cited health concerns such as asthma and the haze that could settle over the Eagle Valley during temperature inversions.

But Rich Minetto, an engineer representing APS, said the 253 pounds was well within U.S. Environmental Protection Agency guidelines.

Jay Johnson, business development manager for APS, said the company could likely reduce emissions by 30 percent, but didn’t know if 50 percent would be economically viable.

Don Helling, Northern Nevada Correctional Center warden, supported the project.

“If I thought for a moment it would put my staff or the inmates in danger, I’d be opposed to it,” he said.

And Elwood Miller, representing the Nevada Fire Safe Council, also spoke on behalf of the plant.

“It is critically important that we establish this for the removal of hazardous fuels,” Miller said.