

2024 Energy Master Plan Public Hearing Comments – Denise Brush

I applaud the state of New Jersey for setting measurable goals in the Energy Master Plan for the generation of clean renewable energy using both solar and wind technology. I firmly believe that a rapid transition to renewable energy is necessary to avoid the worst effects of climate change on our state and nation. I urge you to continue to work towards full implementation of the Energy Master Plan goals in the coming years.

During the past four years I have been (and continue to be) a volunteer leader advocating for offshore wind project development off our coast, with the New Jersey chapter of the Sierra Club. The state Energy Master Plan is a key motivating factor for stakeholders to invest in the development of offshore wind. The recent pause in offshore wind development due to factors outside the state's control is very disappointing, but it's important for the state to keep moving forward on preparatory steps such as the Pre-Build Infrastructure and local and state permitting. Many of these processes take years and it would be a big mistake to lose ground by pausing everything. When the political winds reverse, the state needs to be ready to ramp up wind farm development again.

Warnings of significant increases in electricity prices coming this year have dominated the news lately. Obviously, the grid needs more electricity supply to meet skyrocketing demands. The state needs to use all the tools at its disposal, including legal action, to force grid operator PJM to make investments in grid modernization to prepare for a future of clean energy, rather than prioritizing fossil fuels as they seem inclined to do.

A major source of the skyrocketing demand for electricity is new data centers and warehouses. It would greatly benefit the state to require that new data centers and warehouses supply as much of their own power as possible, using solar or other on-site energy production. While we all use the Internet, the use of data centers to “mine bitcoin” or “develop AI large language models” (both very energy-intensive and of no benefit to New Jersey ratepayers) should be done at their own expense.

Along with electricity prices, I recognize that there are many other competing demands stressing the state budget this year. An excellent tool to begin addressing this issue is the proposed Climate Superfund Act (A4696/S3545) which “imposes

liability on certain fossil fuel companies for certain damages caused by climate change and establishes program in DEP to collect and distribute compensatory payments.”

Since Offshore Wind may not be built out in time to get us to the 2035 renewable energy goals, I would like to see the state double down on solar programs. Successful programs like community solar should be expanded to all ratepayers served by all state utilities rather than limited to low- and moderate-income customers in urban areas.

Additionally, there should be state incentive programs for residential and commercial building electrification and to encourage the installation of solar arrays on brownfields, over parking lots, on warehouse roofs, and over farm fields. The state should also encourage the development of new technologies like battery storage which will be a key component of clean energy-based master plans in the future.

A great incentive for public participation in meeting the state’s clean energy goals as well as addressing price increases would be to permit net metering, so residential and commercial solar panel owners could get money back from their electric utilities for the electricity they add to the grid.