



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

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Title: Supporting Somerville’s application to the Fossil Fuel Free Demonstration Program.

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Agenda Summary

Supporting Somerville’s application to the Fossil Fuel Free Demonstration Program.

Official Text

WHEREAS: The City Council has steadfastly supported sustainable, carbon-free buildings in Somerville, working to do the most within local authority; and

WHEREAS: In August 2022 when the Fossil Fuel Free Demonstration Program was codified into law, Somerville was the first community to submit a home rule petition to restrict the use of fossil fuels in new construction and major renovation projects and the Somerville City Council voted unanimously at the first full council meeting after the law was codified to support submitting such a petition; and

WHEREAS: In January 2023 when municipalities were able to adopt the Specialized Energy Code for the first time, Somerville adopted the code with unanimous support from the City Council, and became one of the first four communities to enact the code on July 1, 2023; and

WHEREAS: The City Council continues to partner with the community and Ballantyne Administration to work towards a carbon net-negative future through coordination with city staff, community members, and developers to organize neighborhood meetings as part of the development review process at which building sustainability and resiliency are discussed and there is a sustained call from constituents for climate action; and

WHEREAS: The need for fossil fuel restrictions in new construction and major renovation projects is particularly urgent in densely-populated Somerville, where residential and commercial buildings are mostly occupied by renters who have limited ability to influence decisions about a building’s major systems and landlords therefore have little incentive to make improvements that will

reduce dependence on fossil fuels, resulting in a destructive cycle of higher energy burdens and declining public health; and

WHEREAS: Poor air quality stemming from combustion of fossil fuels, such as oil and gas, often disproportionately impacts Somerville’s most vulnerable residents and contributes to childhood asthma and adult chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), which is one of the leading causes of hospitalization and death for Somerville residents, and requiring new and renovated buildings to be fossil fuel-free will reduce the incidence of these illnesses and lead to a healthier environment for all residents; and

WHEREAS: According to Somerville Climate Forward, “new development is anticipated to occur at an annual growth rate of over 1% in both residential and commercial sectors” and the Fossil Fuel Free program presents an opportunity to accelerate workforce development in the clean energy space, galvanizing contractors, home energy raters, architects, designers, electricians, plumbers, landscapers, and more; and

WHEREAS: The City Council, Ballantyne Administration, partners, and members of the workforce, will work together to learn how to implement and deploy new, fossil fuel-free technologies and practices on a wider scale which will, over time, have both economically and environmentally beneficial effects in the broader region; and

WHEREAS: To prevent the damaging downstream impacts of locked-in fossil fuel systems, it is critical that buildings built today are built fossil fuel-free and Somerville’s participation in the Fossil Fuel Free Demonstration Program will improve public health and accelerate the city’s efforts to become carbon net negative; and

WHEREAS: As an MBTA and Housing Choice community with a demonstrated commitment to equity and climate action, Somerville is uniquely positioned for success in this program and is eager to lead the way in creating cleaner, more resilient residential and commercial properties that reduce indoor and outdoor air pollution and increase energy efficiency; **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT**

RESOLVED: That the Somerville City Council strongly supports Somerville’s application to the Fossil Fuel Free Demonstration Program to become one of the first 10 communities in the Commonwealth to be allowed to restrict the use of fossil fuels in new construction and major renovation projects and urges the Department of Energy Resources to approve this proposal, submitted on behalf of the community.