

October 24, 2023

TO: KCMO City Council Transportation, Infrastructure, and Operations Committee
RE: Opposition to Proposed Ordinance #230891

On behalf of the Legislative Committee of the Sierra Club Thomas Hart Benton Group we would like to raise concerns with the KCMO Proposed Ordinance #230891 by which the Water Services Department is proposing for a Biogas Use Applications Project. As it stands, this ordinance should be rejected, and the City Council should hold off taking any action until more consideration is made of alternatives through robust discussion that engages all sectors of our City and community.

Sierra Club attended the October 23 meeting of the Climate Protection Steering Committee and listened to the discussion among committee members, and city staff. From the concerns raised by the Committee and information shared by KC Water, it is clear there has not been enough consideration of alternatives to the proposed action in Ord. 230891 and that there has been insufficient public engagement. Further, the proposed ordinance does not provide any guarantee that the RNG diverted from the wastewater treatment plant will be used to offset the use of non-renewable natural gas. The City of Kansas City demanded better than this when it adopted its Climate Protection Plan, and it should not allow staff to deviate from it here.

We see a critical issue being raised by the process by which this proposed ordinance has been advanced by City Staff to the City Council for its consideration. In the Docket Memo it states affirmatively that this proposed agreement with Spire will:

Develop environmentally sound and sustainable infrastructure strategies that improve quality of life and foster economic growth

The Docket Memo is opaque on the process for how this determination was made. It is not made clear from the Memo how this initiative will lead to “faster economic growth.” In discussions before the Climate Steering Committee, the message from KC Water was that it would be using the methane from the wastewater facility to power the facility itself without assurance that it will supply other homes, let alone other hard to service areas in the City.

Regarding the assertion of sustainability, there is no mention of whether the KCMO Office of Environmental Quality was involved in making this determination. Furthermore, there is no indication in the Docket Memo of a metric for how this determination was made. The document does assert that RNG will allow “*KC Water to meet key sustainability goals,*” without specifically identifying these goals. There is no reference to a City document that would describe these goals.

There is no acknowledged connection to the current Climate Protection and Resiliency Plan, let alone mention of the word “climate” in this Docket Memo. In the development of the Climate Protection and Resiliency Plan reliance upon RNG was purposely omitted. Perhaps, a means is needed for transitioning from fossil fuels, but RNG was omitted from the Plan for consideration as a transitional source of energy. Further, it is unclear how RNG will serve merely as a transitional form of energy, when the word “transition” is not used in the Docket Memo, let alone discussion regarding the parameters of this transition period.

The process that led to this proposal could only benefit from the transparency that is needed for the citizens of Kansas City to see that the City is conscientiously considering the goals and framework approved in the Climate Protection and Resiliency Plan.

These process issues need to be explicitly raised not only for this proposed ordinance, but for other such infrastructure initiatives that will appear in the future. The Kansas City community needs reassurance that OEQ is involved in the assessment of these initiatives and that there is compliance with the Climate Protection and

Resiliency Plan. In developing these initiatives, the Kansas City community needs to see that meaningful efforts have been made to consult with the relevant citizen advisory committees.

The success of the Climate Protection and Resiliency Plan depends on a well-informed City Council and an ever-watchful and engaged citizenry which itself is dependent on a transparent process for approval of these initiatives for infrastructure projects that will have a great impact on the quality of our environment and on our progress to meeting climate goals.

Please, reject further consideration of this proposed ordinance until more consideration is made of alternatives through robust discussion that engages all sectors of our City and community.

Sincerely,

Don Wallace,
Member Legislative Committee
THB Group of Missouri Chapter of Sierra Club
Resident, Sixth District, KCMO

//cc:

KCMO City Clerk
Quinton Lucas KCMO Mayor
Andrew Savastino, KCMO Chief Environmental Officer
Robin Gahnahl, KCMO Climate Plan Steering Committee