

Statement to the Philadelphia Gas Commission Hearing prior to the Commission's vote
to approve/deny the Passyunk Energy Center
Dec 4 2018, 1515 Arch Street, Philadelphia PA
Sarah Davidson

Thank you for the opportunity to speak. My name is Sarah Davidson—I am an earth and environmental scientist and live in Graduate Hospital. My son turns 4 next week and will with some luck be 86 in the year 2100.

I suspect that some of you on the Commission might consider some of these concerns as well-meaning people who are overreacting. I want to try and explain where I think this concern is coming from, why I am taking time off from work to be here this morning, and why I know there are a lot of other people like me who would be here too if they could.

When reports from the IPCC or our recent National Climate Assessment talk about the “business as usual” scenario and the unimaginable consequences for our kids that scenario is projected to have, they are not talking about some kind of villain that will take over cities and force us to burn fossil fuels, or even break the law. Those consequences are simply the result of continuing the kinds of fossil fuel development we’ve been doing. This includes projects by entities that may not consider climate change within the scope of their concern. I understand this project is not digging up more coal or cutting down rainforest, but each small project like this is a piece of the “business as usual” scenario.

This project is at a minimum in spirit at odds with Mayor Kenney’s commitment to the Paris Agreement and the City’s plans to reduce emissions. This project will commit to emissions for 25 years when to meet the Paris Agreement we need to be at zero net emissions by roughly 2050 or sooner, 30 years. Voting and public polling records indicate that the vast majority of Philadelphia families support reducing emissions and development of jobs and infrastructure that don’t rely on fossil fuels.

For these reasons, I request that the Commission

- Provide and share with the public a thorough evaluation of projected impacts from extraction to burning of the gas involved in the project, including on public health and safety during operation of the facility and transportation in and out of the city.
- And assessment of financial viability over the life of the project given climate policy scenarios such as for carbon pricing in the US or importing countries.
- Consider how to begin a discussion and evaluation of alternative projects that shift the Gas Commission away from a focus on natural gas and towards projects that will reduce local air pollution and eventually eliminate the City’s emissions.