

Public Hearing on the CAC Draft Scoping Plan
Binghamton, April 12, 2022

First, thank you! You have poured much hard work and careful thought into this scoping plan. You obviously care deeply about our collective future.

There are many aspects to climate mitigation but today I would like to comment on Chapter 18: Gas System Transition. I was happy to see “community thermal heat pumps” listed there as a potential solution.


With this solution, the current gas grid would be replaced, over time, by an interconnected network of ground source loop fields that use the existing gas pipeline right-of-way. This network would be built, owned, and maintained by today’s gas utilities, which would transition to become thermal energy utilities. Rather than supplying gas to their customers, they would instead supply heat from the ground in the form of water that is kept at around 50 degrees by being pumped through the loop field. Existing gas furnaces would be replaced with ground source heat pump equipment, which could either be owned by the customer or by the utility.

I recently heard an excellent explanation of the community thermal proposal on the April 1 Volts podcast (1). It explained the many advantages of this solution. For example, the gas utilities can adapt their existing workforce and build out this service at scale much more quickly than can be done by electrifying one building at a time. According to their analysis, the utility could provide this thermal energy service to customers at a lower price than they are paying now for natural gas.

I look forward to New York agencies conducting a thorough evaluation of transitioning our gas grid to community thermal, drawing insights from the several pilot projects that are currently underway. I believe that community thermal will end up being one of the key technologies that enable New York to achieve its climate goals.

(1) Volts podcast: tinyurl.com/volts412022. Host David Roberts interviewed the two founders of a Massachusetts nonprofit called HEET (heet.org).

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