

Clear

0°, Delhi, N.Y.
Full Forecast ()

Catskills Today

THE REPORTER

()

Article Search



Advanced search (/search.html)

 My account (/account/)

 Log out (/login.html?action=logout)

Main Menu



Batteries, Benefits and Big Questions: Hamden Weighs Rules for Massive Battery Storage Project



There was standing room only at the public hearing for a battery storage law in Hamden on Dec. 3.

LILLIAN BROWNE/THE REPORTER



Posted Monday, December 8, 2025 12:00 am

By Lillian Browne

HAMDEN - In a packed town hall on Wednesday, Dec. 3, Hamden residents listened intently as town officials and their attorney walked them through a proposal that could reshape a quiet hilltop - and, potentially, the town's tax base.

The Hamden Town Council held a public hearing on a proposed Energy Storage Local Law, a framework that would regulate large-scale battery projects before a single container is built.

"The purpose of this proposed local law is to adopt regulations for the installation and use of battery storage systems and equipment in a manner which protects public health, safety and welfare of the town of Hamden," Supervisor Wayne Marshfield said as he opened the hearing.

By the end of the night, after more than an hour of questions about fire risk, electromagnetic fields, wildlife, taxes and technology, council members later unanimously adopted the law during its regular meeting.

A law written before the project - on purpose

Marshfield reminded residents that the law did not appear overnight.

“This local law we’ve been working on... the planning board had a lot to do with it,” he said. “We’ve been working on it for over a year.”

The timing is not incidental. Frazier Storage LLC has submitted an application for a 135-megawatt lithium-ion battery energy storage system off Cobbe Cross Road, on roughly 33 acres near the Hamden–Delhi town line. The project would tie into the NYPA/NYSEG infrastructure on Hamden Hill, using new 115-kV lines to and from the existing substation.

An application was filed Oct. 14 with the town code officer, Marshfield said, and was deemed incomplete pending further information.

“What we have here tonight,” Marshfield told the room, “is we developed this battery energy storage local law. We’re really not here to discuss battery storage. We’re here to discuss the local law. Any changes in this local law that would make it better for the community is what we’re looking for.”

“Why did you even draw up a law?”

The first resident at the podium, Dotti Howe, went straight to the point.

“I’m just curious why [you] decided to even draw up a law for the battery storage,” she said. “Why did you consider this?”

“For fear we were going to get a project like we got here standing before us,” Marshfield replied.

He noted that Hamden already has a local law governing large-scale solar - written before any such project arrived.

“So when they come in, there’s a law that they got to abide by. Right now there’s no law.”

Howe pushed further, noting that the town is not required to accept such a project at all.

“You guys do know that you don’t have to agree to have them come in, right?” she said.

Marshfield agreed. “That’s right,” he said.

Who pays the lawyers?

Several residents focused on attorney Kevin Young of Young/Sommer, the firm advising Hamden on the battery law and any future application review.

Howe questioned a perceived conflict of interest, saying she understood Young’s firm also does work for the developers.

Young explained that for a complex project, the town will assemble a team of outside experts - engineers, fire-safety specialists, decommissioning and road-use consultants - and require the applicant to fund their work through an escrow account. The protocol mirrors the Clean Path Energy Project, now on hold, that would have traversed and impacted the towns of Hancock, Colchester, Hamden and Delhi, should it have moved forward.

“The town is requiring the applicant to set up an escrow agreement where the applicant funds, the town has a pool of money, and then the experts bill the town, who pays it out of that escrow,” Young said. “The escrow account is going to start at \$25,000. When that escrow account gets down to \$5,000 they have to back it up.”

His own time, Young said, would be billed the same way.

He also described a standing conflict waiver: if his firm is involved with the developer elsewhere, it may not appear on both sides of the same matter. “If there is a real issue,” Young said, “they can’t use my firm, and my firm can’t appear in front of the town or in any document associated.”

Peak usage, climate law - and why Hamden is on the map

One new resident, Frank Sclafani, said he had only recently moved to Hamden and wanted to understand why such a large facility was being proposed in a small rural town.

“Has there been a history of power issues to Hamden?” he asked. “Are we having issues with either losing power because of peak problems, or is this just marginally wide and statewide?”

“This has really nothing to do with Hamden,” Young replied. He traced the project back to New York’s 2019 Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act, which requires an 85% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 and a massive shift from fossil-fuel generation to renewables and storage.

“When you use solar and wind, they only generate when the sun is shining and the wind is blowing,” Young said. “So in order to reduce the total amount of solar plants and wind plants, they have this concept of battery storage... They’re all over the state.”

Hamden, he added, is geographically attractive: it sits near the Marcy South transmission line and what Marshfield called “probably one of the largest substations in the United States, if not the largest.”

“For a site, it’s really prime for a project, whether it’s wind or solar or battery,” Marshfield said. “It’s out of the way. It’s secluded by itself. There’s no residence within a couple [of] thousand feet of it.”

Fire, smoke and what happens in 30 years

Residents repeatedly returned to fire risk - a concern sharpened by high-profile blazes at lithium-ion facilities elsewhere and electric-vehicle fires closer to home.

“As you guys know, if there’s a fire, doesn’t matter if there’s a tank of water up there... the fire could burn for up to six days,” Howe said. “It’s going to contaminate things.”

Young did not minimize the danger.

“If there is a fire, you know, we’re not equipped like that,” he said of local volunteers. “Part of the application process is for them to develop a plan and to fund the plan of educating our fire people, making sure they have the right equipment and funding.”

In practice, Marshfield added, “all the fire suppression does is keep the other batteries from igniting. The one that’s ablaze, you’ve got to let it burn.”

The law, Young said, requires an emergency response plan, reviewed not just by the town but likely with help from Delaware County’s emergency management and an outside fire-safety expert. Training and equipment for the life of the project would be built into agreements with the developer.

Residents also worried about what happens when the project is no longer viable - whether in 15 years, when the batteries reach the end of their useful life, or 40 years, if technology moves on.

“We have what they call a decommissioning plan,” Young said. “What’s going to happen in 30 years when they have to remove it?”

The proposed law requires the company to post financial security equal to 150% of the estimated decommissioning cost, updated every five years, he said. Critically, developers must assume worst-case disposal, not idealized “recycling,” when they calculate how much it will cost to dismantle the facility.

“If the company goes under,” Young said, “that’s why we require either [the money] in a bank account or a bond, so if the company goes under, the town still has the funds to decommission.”

A resident at the hearing clarified the triggering condition: “I’m pretty sure it’s six months of no use, and they have to [tear] everything back.”

Young confirmed the law uses a fixed period of non-operation - currently 12 months in the model language – and said those specifics could be refined as the town finalizes the law and later reviews a project-specific decommissioning plan.

EMF anxiety and ‘the invisible rainbow’

Not all concerns were about visible risks.

Katherine Bridges, who lives in Walton but owns property in the hills of Hamden, described herself as hypersensitive to electromagnetic and radiofrequency fields. She arrived in a pink hoodie and pants woven with copper and silver fibers, she said, to block exposure.

Bridges said she has been measuring radiofrequency levels from smart meters and other devices and believes current WHO (World Health Organization) and FCC (Federal Communications Commission) exposure standards do not adequately protect health.

“I didn’t see anything in the law about the expected electromagnetic, radio, microwave frequency,” she said. “It’s not like smoke from the factory, but it affects our health.”

Young said the town could ask its fire-safety expert - who previously advised local governments on the high-voltage Clean Path transmission project - to evaluate electromagnetic impacts as part of the review.

“We can have that be part of what we’ll have them examine,” he said.

Lithium today, sodium tomorrow?

Another resident, Tyson Robb, said he supported the project in principle, citing its potential to reduce natural-gas use statewide.

“I’d like to say that I’m in favor of the project for a number of different reasons,” he said. “Probably 55–60% of your electricity is coming from natural gas. These battery storage places are going to decrease that over time.”

But he urged the town to push the developer on battery chemistry.

“Lithium - we think of it as a new thing,” he said. “It’s not necessarily the best thing for us. I think there’s maybe some sodium batteries that would be a good alternative. The sodium batteries, we can harvest all the materials within the U.S. They’re not dangerous.”

He worried that a lithium-ion fire could send cobalt, lithium and magnesium into the air and then into soil, plants and wildlife. “If you like fishing, if you like hunting, if we have a fire problem, those things will be impacted,” he said.

Young said the town cannot dictate technology the way it might under traditional zoning. But under New York’s environmental review law, SEQRA, Hamden can demand a hard look at alternatives.

“We can say to them ‘We’ve heard that there are alternatives that don’t pose the same fire risks or have the same consequences,” he said. “Have you looked at those alternatives and explained to us why you’re choosing what you’re choosing?”

Watershed, pollinators and the land itself

Others pressed on land and water impacts in the New York City watershed.

“This land, 33 acres that this facility will go on - are they going to cut it down? Is it farmland right now?” resident Missy Sclafani asked. “What about the pollinators?”

“It’s mostly open land,” Marshfield said. Another official added that the site is in an agricultural field that has not been actively used in some time. The battery yard itself, they said, would occupy only five to seven acres of the 33-acre property, with the rest in utility corridors and buffers.

Young said the project will need city and state stormwater permits under some of the most stringent rules in New York, because it lies in the watershed. The town, he added, will rely on Delaware County planner Sean Leddy, the town’s engineer Lamont Engineers, and state Ag & Markets - along with the county agricultural board - to scrutinize grading, runoff, soil disturbance and agricultural impacts.

What’s in it for Hamden?

Residents repeatedly returned to a blunt question: what does Hamden gain?

“We house it, we take the risks, and we get a little bit of a tax break,” Missy Sclafani said. “If something catastrophic happens, then we have to deal with that. So it’s a big ask.”

Young outlined the financial upside in simple math. If the facility is valued at roughly \$200 million and the town’s full taxable value is around \$500 million, the project would shoulder a significant portion of the local tax burden.

“With \$200 million in increased assessed value, [they] would pick up, you know, two-sevenths of the real property tax,” he said. “There will be a benefit to the rest of us. Our taxes should go down.”

Councilmember Brett Sage noted that the same logic applies to county and school taxes, which are also based on assessed value.

Some residents pushed for more direct benefits: local hiring requirements, host community agreements, or commitments to use Hamden- and Delaware County-based contractors.

“Maybe you could consider that X percent of the funds that they spend has to be either, I don’t know, Hamden, Delhi or Delaware County-based companies,” one man suggested. “So at least that work is going here, not some company from some other state.”

Young said a “host community benefit agreement” - additional payments or projects negotiated outside the tax system - is possible but must be handled carefully. Marshfield noted that a previous transmission project, the Marcy South line, helped fund local facilities, including the very building where the hearing was held.

“We want this local law”

As the evening wound down, Marshfield thanked the crowd for staying and for pressing the board on details.

“We really, really, really want this local law,” he said, “so we’ve got something to make them abide by.”

The proposed Battery Energy Storage Systems Local Law includes:

- Detailed permitting requirements

- Setbacks and siting standards
- A decommissioning plan backed by financial security at 150% of cost
- Insurance and bonding
- A road-use agreement to protect town roads and bridges
- Requirements for emergency preparedness, training and fire-safety plans
- Provisions addressing ownership changes if the project is sold

The law was reviewed simultaenously by the Delaware County Planning Department and ultimately adopted following slight adjustments in wording. Because Hamden officials approved the law without significant changes, it did not have to re-advertise a second hearing.

OTHER ITEMS THAT MAY INTEREST YOU

Roxbury Gears Up for Autumn and Holiday Festivities (/stories/roxbury-gears-up-for-autumn-and-holiday-festivities,269196)

Catskill Recreation Center Seeks \$10K From Andes in ... (/stories/catskill-recreation-center-seeks-10k-from-andes-in-2028-budget,269197)

Roxbury Veterans Get Community Attention (/stories/roxbury-veterans-get-community-attention,269198)

Delaware County Receives \$15K Grant for Election ... (/stories/delaware-county-receives-15k-grant-for-election-security-inspector-recruitment,269067)

READ THE E-EDITION
