


307 Washington street hearing letter

From lobbies-respite-3p@icloud.com <lobbies-respite-3p@icloud.com>

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To ZBA <ZBA@town.arlington.ma.us>

 1 attachment (165 KB)

BGC National Grid Arlington.pdf;

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Dear ZBA board:

Please find attached a letter of concern regarding the proposed actions at 307 Washington Str .

Thank you for your ongoing service to Arlington and residents.

Sincerely,
Brian Guzik
39 Greeley circle.

Statement of Concern

BGC/ National Grid Natural Gas Take Station Expansion

I believe the residents of the Stratton / Turkey Hill neighborhood in Arlington MA, should have more information about the proposed expansion of the National Grid natural gas “Take station” and details on potential implications and options. While the need for safe and robust energy infrastructure is appreciated, this project raises serious land use, environmental, health, and equity uncertainties that demand thorough consideration and meaningful mitigation before any approval.

1. Preservation of Community Trails and Green Space

The wooded area slated for expansion includes a critical walking path used daily by residents to traverse our neighborhood safely. Due to the unique layout of the streets in the neighborhood, these paths routinely provides safe pedestrian connectivity to schools, parks, friends, and services such as voting between the Mountain/Tower/Greeley/Tomahawk areas. Losing access to this area would fragment our neighborhood and negatively impact mobility for families- including children that routinely walk to Stratton School or to see friends.

Is BGC/ National Grid aware of the traffic pattern of the residents that it shares this neighborhood with? What community outreach or consideration was made in the design of this facility expansions?

2. Loss of Trees and Environmental Impact

The proposed expansion will entail removal of mature trees and natural vegetation. The city of Arlington traditionally prioritizes preservation of trees. In addition to improving neighborhood character, air quality, this area provides a buffer between residents and the facility, decreasing the noise and visual disruption of hosting a Utility facility in our residential neighborhoods. An increase in facility size, combined with loss of the protection effect of the trees would likely have a multiplier effect on the negative impact. The permanent loss of this natural area would undermine one of the few remaining natural spaces, and detract from our neighborhoods appearance and value.

Is the removal of this green space consistent with the values of Arlington and the Turkey Hill community? What alternatives have been considered?

3. Emissions and Health Concerns

Safety is important to the residents of Turkey Hill. This is a good opportunity for BGC/National Grid to educate our residents about any potential impacts this station may have on them. There is anecdotal evidence that Natural gas pumping and compressor facilities release air pollutants during operation and maintenance. These can include volatile organic compounds

(VOCs), nitrogen oxides (NOx), particulate matter, and other combustion byproducts that are associated with respiratory, cardiovascular, and neurological effects, particularly for sensitive populations (children, elderly, and those with pre-existing conditions). It is said that such emissions occur continuously and often in episodic peaks during maintenance “blowdowns,” even if regulated by permits. Studies have highlighted gaps in monitoring and health risk assessment, suggesting that typical permitting does not fully capture the true exposures communities face over time. This is not a scientific analysis, but a quick non-expert assessment of potential concerns. Safe and reliable energy infrastructure is important, but those living near such infrastructure, should do so fully informed.

Are such periodic emission risks relevant here? The potential for a catastrophic event, while very likely exceedingly low, should be discussed. Are all these potential risks unfounded?

We also acknowledge that improvements in the facility are likely to improve these risks, but having the resident aware of the magnitude and nature of the baseline risks and those going forward seems prudent.

4. Noise and Quality of Life Impacts

Natural gas pumping stations and compressor facilities are known to generate continuous noise from engines, equipment, and venting, which can carry into nearby residential areas. Research has documented that homes near such facilities experience higher average sound levels, potentially affecting sleep, stress levels, and overall well-being.

Are these concerns applicable in this situation? Does increased scale and proximity of the facility to residential buildings impact potential intrusion? Does removal of the trees, a natural sound barrier, enhance any potential noise exposure?

5. Aesthetics and Residential Character

The expansion of a fenced, industrial-scale natural gas facility into a residential neighborhood is a visual and experiential intrusion. Tall fences, machinery, and industrial structures will permanently alter the character and aesthetic value of this part of our community, detracting from property values and the everyday experience of those who live here.

This seems to be a significant expansion from the current footprint. Based on a non-expert review of the permitting documents appears to be a double or tripling in building footprint, with a dramatic addition of pavement and fencing. Is there an expanded essential functionality for this site, or other justification for such an increase in presence in a residential neighborhood? What effort has been made by National Grid to get residential input and buy-in on this significant modification of our neighborhood?

6. Equity and Unequal Service

It is particularly ironic that **to my knowledge, none of residents of Greeley circle are served by BGC/National Grid.** Over the past years, it is my understanding that that a number of

residents have made that inquiries into obtaining natural gas service, and they indicated that it would have cost tens-of-thousands of dollars for any resident to obtain natural gas service, with no potential cost-reduction for collective commitment by those residents. It is said that BGC/National Grid communicated that extending service to Greeley Circle was economically challenging. The need/desire for such service is illustrated by the trend of new /renovated housing on Greeley circle to have in-ground propane tanks installed, a feature that is evidently more economically viable for residents than BGC/National Grid service. At the same time, the company seeks to expand infrastructure in other parts of our neighborhood that potentially bring emissions, noise, environmental, and lifestyle disruption. This raises questions of **fairness and equity and commitment to community**:

As residents that share their community with National Grid, is it reasonable that we being asked to sacrifice positive aspect of our community, while some of the most impacted residents have not been provided reasonable access to the benefits of service?

It is reasonable for residents to have more information including:

1. **A review of alternative plans** that avoid impacts to neighborhood green space and pedestrian connectivity.
2. **Environmental and health impact assessments**, including data supporting air quality and noise monitoring in locations representative of residences.
3. **Meaningful community engagement** in planning decisions, with transparent data and responsive mitigation strategies. This significant proposal came without warning to many residents.
4. **Potential design alternatives** that minimize aesthetic impacts, including reduced footprint, vegetative buffers, architectural treatments, or relocation to less sensitive areas.

A solution that responsibly balances energy infrastructure needs with the health, safety, and quality of life of our neighborhood is the goal.

Selected References

- Environmental Health Project: Compressor Stations
 - <https://www.environmentalhealthproject.org/compressor-stations>
- Community Health Impacts from Natural Gas Pipeline Compressor Stations
 - Davis et al *Geohealth* 2023 Oct 31;7(11):e2023GH000874. doi: 10.1029/2023GH000874
 - <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10616731/>
- Natural Gas Compressor Stations May Expose Nearby Residents To Chronic Noise Pollution
 - <https://sph.umd.edu/news/natural-gas-compressor-stations-may-expose-nearby-residents-chronic-noise-pollution>
- A pilot study to assess residential noise exposure near natural gas compressor stations
 - Boyle et al; *PLOS ONE* 12(4): e0174310. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0174310>