

https://www.newjerseyhills.com/florham_park_eagle/news/florham-park-officials-frustrated-with-misleading-energy-aggregation-program/article_140a7b6b-9a81-51a1-a790-11d97237c41b.html

Florham Park officials frustrated with 'misleading' energy aggregation program

By CHRISTINE LEE Editor Feb 22, 2019



Vicky Molloy, a vice president for energy solutions at Voorhees Township-based Concord Energy Solutions, listens as the Florham Park Borough Council questions her on the energy aggregation program's implementation at the Thursday, Feb. 21 meeting. Among the issues raised by the governing body with the program are its use of the borough logo, Mayor Mark Taylor's signature in communication materials, residents automatically being signed up for the program and the misleading energy savings it offers.

Photo by Christine Lee

FLORHAM PARK - What is meant to be a program to help residents save money on electric bills has instead left borough officials frustrated about its implementation.

Borough Council members grilled a representative from Concord Engineering about the program at its meeting Thursday, Feb. 21.

Since 2017, Florham Park residents can participate in an energy aggregation program through the Morris Area Energy Cooperative to save money on their electric bills. There is a periodic renewal in participation and the next round of the program will start next month and run for 19 months.

The program, overseen by the state's Board of Public Utilities, was implemented in the borough by an ordinance adopted in February 2017.

Among the issues raised by the governing body with the program are its use of the borough logo, Mayor Mark Taylor's signature in communication materials, residents automatically being signed up for the program, and the misleading energy savings it offers.

Councilman Charles Malone said he understood during the past year of the program's implementation, the savings in electric rates were quoted at seven-tenths of one cent compared to rates offered by Jersey Central Power and Light (JCP&L), which services the borough. But that isn't the case.

"This last go-around happens to be seven-tenths of one cent below what the then-prevailing rate was by JCP&L," he said. "The residents' savings is not versus the then-prevailing JCP&L rate. It is versus what they would have experienced had they been with JCP&L the entire length of the contract.

"There's no transparency to this."

The councilman suggested that residents receive a customized statement outlining their savings.

Opting Out

Vicky Molloy, a vice president for Voorhees Township-based Concord Energy Services, said the program offers residents another option to consider for their energy supplier.

Eleven percent of Florham Park residents have opted out of the energy aggregation program, she reported at the meeting. Residents who use existing third-party energy suppliers would need to opt in to be included in the program, Molloy added.

Despite the criticisms, she observed that many residents are excited to be participating.

“There was a lot of savings last time,” Molloy said, adding that residents can see how much money they have saved online.

Malone countered that residents are signed up for the program by default and “they need to actively take action” to opt out.

Molloy responded that the automatic enrollment is in place because, "We couldn't go out for bid for a rate unless the suppliers knew exactly what they were looking at for participation."

Should Florham Park officials choose to end participation in the program, they would need to notify the consortium before the next round of bidding for the program.

'Misleading'

Council President Scott Carpenter said finding out how to opt out isn't clear. It is also unclear, he added, who to contact should there be an issue.

"We provided residents an opportunity to save money," he remarked, "but it seems we're doing more management than we really want to do.

"I never received anything in the mail about the aggregation company where I could garner this information."

Borough Administrator William Huyler said the mis-labeled letters "caused hundreds of phone calls to come in." The letters weren't reviewed by borough officials, he added.

Councilman Malone stated that no letters should be mailed under the borough logo or with Mayor Taylor's signature without a review.

"It's not happening," he told Molloy. "You're misleading residents to think that this is coming from the borough when it is not."

Councilwoman Carmen Cefolo-Pane wondered why letters to residents couldn't be sent on behalf of the energy aggregation companies.

"Why don't you just do it out of your own company?" she asked Molloy.

In response, Molloy said the option is available "if that is something the town wishes us to do." She further promised to review how the information got to residents with the mayor's signature and borough logo.

"I promise you I will go back to the office and we will find the information that was sent out and to whom," she said.

Malone suggested adding a disclaimer explaining the borough's views on the energy aggregation program.

Mayor Taylor said going forward, a solution needs to be formed to ensure the program is rolled out effectively without any issues.

Councilman William Zuckerman agreed, stating that he hopes Molloy understands that "nothing goes out with the logo or the mayor's signature."

Molloy said information is provided on the program during outreach meetings. But there could be other avenues to communicate with residents, she allowed.

She suggested that consortium officials could come to a future Work Session meeting of the council to understand how the program can be better implemented.

Malone said "it would be great" if Molloy provided solutions to concerns raised by the governing body.

She said Tuesday, Feb. 26 that Concord officials are preparing a response to the governing body's remarks and are requesting to present it at the next council meeting.

Contact Editor Christine Lee at clee@newjerseyhills.com. Find her on Twitter [@Cleespot](#) and on [Facebook](#).

MORE INFORMATION