

MEDFORD

Firm wants to build fuel cell plant

California outfit's proposal met with queries from town

BY CARL MACGOWAN
carl.macgowan@newsday.com

A California energy company is proposing to build a fuel cell plant in Medford that the firm says will be cleaner and cheaper than traditional power plants.

Bloom Energy Corp., based in Sunnyvale, California, would build the facility at the property of East End Bus Lines, on Horseblock Road. The school bus company would remain open.

The power facility would produce about 6 megawatts of electricity, enough to power about 5,000 homes, Bloom Energy officials said.

Fuel cells produce energy by using natural gas to create elec-

trochemical reactions. Bloom Energy officials said the process is done without combustion, as in conventional gas-fired plants, and produces relatively low carbon dioxide emissions.

But the proposal faced questions Monday at a meeting of the Brookhaven Town Planning Board, which is weighing the company's request for approvals of a site plan and special permit. The hearing was adjourned to May 13.

Planning board chairman Vincent E. Pascale said the board would not vote on the plan until members have researched the technology and its potential environmental impacts.

"There's a lot of technical stuff, so we're not doing this tonight," Pascale told Bloom Energy officials during the meeting. "We're going to do a lot of study."

The proposal also faced questions from Medford residents, who expressed doubt over the



The East End Bus Lines building on Horseblock Road in Medford, where Bloom Energy Corp. has proposed to build its facility.

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company's claim that the facility would not affect air quality.

The Medford Taxpayers and Civic Association, in a letter to the planning board, said the plant would produce 20,422 tons per year of carbon dioxide. The group asked the board for a more extensive scientific review of the project before voting on it.

"It is a significant contributor of greenhouse gases. That's the dirty little secret of fuel cells," civic association president Brett

Houdek told board members. "This really does need a good look. These are going to be popping up everywhere."

Company officials said the plant would produce 19,570 tons of carbon dioxide a year, but also said that would be well within federal and state restrictions. The plant also would reduce the need for energy from fossil fuel plants, the company said.

"We're bringing down the total carbon dioxide produc-

tion," Brian Kane, the company's director of applications engineering, told the board.

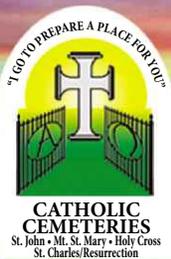
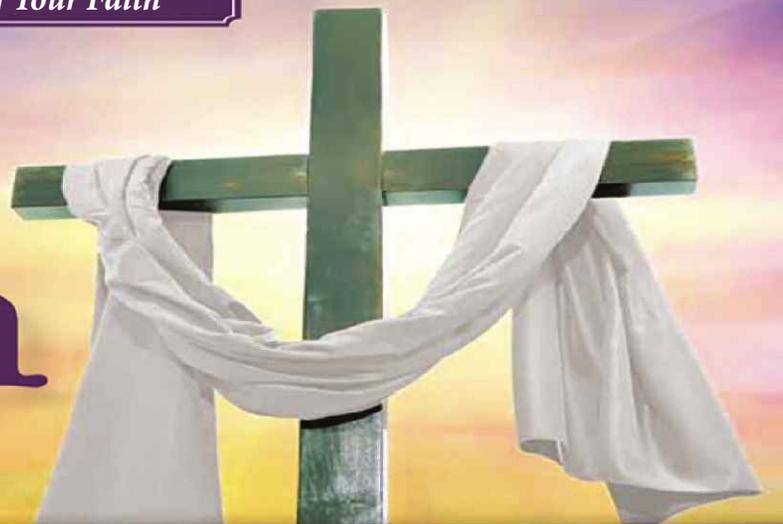
A Long Island Power Authority spokesman could not say whether Bloom Energy has a contract with the authority for fuel cells in Medford. The company has worked with the authority on other projects.

Fuel cell technology has had a spotty history on Long Island. LIPA canceled a \$21 million deal with Latham, New York-based Plug Power about a decade ago when the company's devices had technical glitches and had to be replaced.

Since then, LIPA has reversed course and sought to jump-start fuel cell projects. Bloom Energy has installed fuel cells at several Long Island shopping centers, and, nationwide, the firm has built systems for companies such as Home Depot, Apple computer and Stop & Shop.

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