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Article published Dec 22, 2011

City tackles energy project behind closed doors

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MONTPELIER —City Manager William Fraser said Wednesday that he believes the city's costs for thermal energy from the planned district heating plant will be in line with expectations.

But that is all the public was allowed to know about high-stakes negotiations with the state that city officials met to discuss in secret Wednesday morning.

In an email Monday, Fraser said the special meeting at City Hall was to update the City Council on the details of the negotiations, review areas of disagreement and get feedback from the council about "areas of concern" so those can be incorporated into the contracts.

These contracts will determine how much the city will pay for thermal energy produced at the biomass power plant that the state will own.

If purchasing energy from the state, and paying off bonds associated with building an underground distribution system, should cost more than what the city would pay for heating oil, then the project will not proceed. That's a requirement placed on city officials by the City Council.

On Wednesday, Fraser said he believed the costs will meet expectations.

However, after Fraser finished his overview of the negotiations, the City Council decided to go into executive session, citing the contract negotiations exception to the open meetings law. The room was cleared and the door closed to the public and the media.

Repeated requests by The Times Argus to see the contracts up for discussion have been denied. The City Council was expected to take up the matter at Wednesday evening's meeting.

Attending the closed-door meeting were City Council members Andy Hooper, Nancy Sherman, Alan Weiss, Tom Golonka, Sarah Jarvis and Angela Timpone, Mayor Mary Hooper, city attorney Richard Saudek, Fraser, district energy project manager Harold Garabedian, and three members from the Montpelier Energy Advisory Committee: Edith Pike-Biegunska, Justin McCade and Ken Jones.
