

8/5/25

6

Good evening, Supervisors. My name is Briana Kouma, and I am here on behalf of the Iowa Chapter of the Sierra Club and our members in Woodbury County. I first want to say thank you again for holding these hearings and allowing the community to have a voice on this matter. I'm here because the decisions you're making about zoning will shape the future of this county, not just for industry, but for families, farmers, and generations to come. I urge you to vote no on zoning changes that would allow the construction or siting of nuclear reactors and nuclear waste storage in Woodbury County. Today, I want to focus on four key issues: public health, energy myths, water use, and ~~economic pl~~ *economic policy*.

A 2002 peer-reviewed study in Archives of Environmental Health found something deeply disturbing: when nuclear power plants were shut down across the U.S, there were clear and measurable health improvements in nearby communities.

Infant mortality rates dropped by 15 to 20%, and childhood cancer rates also declined within just two years of plant closures.

This wasn't a study about disasters - these were 'normal' operating plants. That means even when nothing goes wrong, just through routine emissions, nuclear plants still expose nearby residents to harmful radioactive isotopes like strontium-90 and iodine-131.

These particles end up in our air, our soil, and our food. Babies and young children are the most vulnerable, their developing bodies absorb more radiation per pound than adults.

Do we really want to bring that risk here?

^ Source: Mangano, J. J., Gould, J. M., Sternglass, E. J., Sherman, J. D., Brown, J., & McDonnell, W. (2002). Infant death and childhood cancer reductions after nuclear plant closings in the United States. *Archives of Environmental Health: An International Journal*, 57(1), 23-31.

2nd The Myth of 'Baseload' Nuclear for Big Industry or Tech

We've heard a lot about nuclear being necessary to attract data centers or manufacturers and that wind and solar can't meet their energy needs.

But that's simply not supported by facts. Google, Microsoft, Meta, all operate major data centers in Iowa today, powered by the wind and solar energy we already have. They buy power through the regional grid and use clean energy contracts, not local nuclear plants.

They aren't asking for nuclear. They're asking for clean, fast, scalable energy, and they want it now, not in 10 to 15 years when an SMR might be online, if it even gets built.

Let's not tie our local economy to an energy solution that's speculative, delayed, and risky, especially when clean energy is working here today.

3rd Massive Water Use. We also need to talk about water. Nuclear power is one of the most water-intensive energy sources on the planet. Cooling even a small modular reactor requires millions of gallons of water per day, depending on the design.

We're in a time of worsening droughts, nitrate contamination, and water scarcity. Approving nuclear zoning could place severe pressure on our rivers, wells, and farming water supply.

If a reactor is located near the Missouri River, what happens during a flood or heat wave? We've already seen climate extremes affect power plants nationwide. Let's not create a new strain on a critical resource just to chase an energy option we don't actually need.

Lastly, Nuclear plants take a decade or more to build, face constant cost overruns, and leave counties on the hook for cleanup and waste management.

Renewables are cheaper, faster to deploy, and don't leave behind toxic waste. If Woodbury County wants a resilient economy, we should focus on solar, wind, battery storage, and transmission upgrades, not nuclear.

Some have said this is just a procedural change to allow for 'conditional use.' But zoning is our first line of defense. Once the door is opened, it's nearly impossible to close. This change invites industrial-scale nuclear infrastructure into our county, without any actual project proposal and without any local vote.

I urge you: Don't give away our power as a community to say no. Don't make this decision easier for companies who won't have to live here, but harder for those of us who do. Please protect our community and vote no on this zoning amendment.