

Resolution on University of Florida (UF) Energy Plans

**Sponsoring organizations: NAACP Alachua County Branch
and Southern Alliance for Clean Energy**

March 14, 2022

Preamble:

Plans to build a new methane gas-fired Central Energy Plant (CEP) at the University of Florida (UF) are just the latest in a series of misconceived decisions that endanger the UF community and compromise our mission to be a world-class educational institution.

In this latest controversy, President Fuchs and the UF Board of Trustees are fast-tracking a controversial plan to install a fossil-gas-powered energy plant right in the heart of the UF campus. In this location, fumes and pollutants will affect thousands of UF students, faculty and staff, as well as patients at the UF Medical Center.

No community input has been sought regarding this very consequential CEP design or plan. This lack of transparency has left the UF community largely unaware that such far-reaching decisions are even being discussed.

The UF Board of Trustees is now in the final stages of approving a plan for a methane gas-powered plant. This plan is misguided for several reasons:

1. This plan clashes starkly with the pledge made by UF officials in 2006 to achieve carbon neutrality at the university by 2025. UF has violated its commitment to sustainability by planning to power the university for at least the next 50 years with natural (methane) gas, an extremely potent greenhouse pollutant. Despite assurances that this new energy plant will be flexible enough to utilize other fuels (bio-gas and hydrogen) when they become available, the design that is now nearly fully approved, will assure that UF has no chance at all of reaching its stated zero-carbon emissions goal. Not in 2025, not by 2035, and not even by 2045.
2. The cost for methane gas to burn in power plants is skyrocketing, while the price of solar energy continues to fall. These trends are likely to continue and even accelerate in the decade ahead. As evidence, the largest three investor-owned utilities in Florida have been approved to charge customers in 2022 an additional \$1.3 billion in additional higher methane gas cost due to spiking prices. As new laws and regulations aimed at limiting the use of fossil fuels begin to take effect, UF could easily find itself holding stranded assets within the next decade or two. At that point, the CEP will be a deep stain on the university's reputation, and also a drain on its credit rating.
3. A huge energy transition is underway. Many universities have done well to recognize this and have adopted intelligent and creative ways to move forward. Forty-three colleges and universities in the U.S. already generate more than 100% of the energy they use through clean, renewable methods. The University of Florida is not accustomed to ranking near the bottom but because of the failure of UF management to recognize new energy realities, the new CEP—as currently configured—will assure that UF is painfully behind.
4. RMI – the Rocky Mountain Institute – has conducted a clean energy portfolio model analysis of this polluting fossil gas power plant and the key finding is that the net present value cost of a 100% clean energy portfolio is \$120M, much less than that of the proposed Central Energy Plant's cost of \$235M. Additionally, building a gas plant locks UF into buying decades of expensive fossil gas.

Demands:

The United Faculty of Florida urge that UF must publicly acknowledge that the University's mission to serve the public is independent of the short-term financial interests of companies that profit from the extraction and transportation of fossil fuels like methane gas. UF should uphold its mission statement as the prime directive for all University activities, including decisions on how to provide energy to the campus.

Slow down the process and seek community input on such a significant, long-term investment.

In the interest of transparency, UF should release to the public all documents, emails and other communications relating to planning decisions made about the proposed new CEP.

UF must commit itself again to using clean renewable energy sources like solar + battery storage, energy efficiency measures, and electrifying fleets.

UF must seek creative new ways to lower its carbon footprint including, but not limited to:

1. Reducing the need for steam and chilled water with retrofits to campus buildings.
2. Where steam is required, build small, inexpensive modular steam plants that can be phased out as alternatives become cheaper, more efficient, and more available. Size new units to the new reduced load based on campus wide efficiency upgrades and other efforts.
3. Power new construction with non-steam sources.
4. Reduce energy demand on campus by upgrading buildings with LED lighting, new windows, high efficiency HVACs.
5. Build solar systems off campus that are net metered, and install rooftop solar on campus that is not grid connected to fill energy needs that are reasonably predictable.
6. Buy power from Duke Energy and/or Gainesville Regional Utilities to avoid the risk of stranded assets.

This resolution was passed unanimously by the UFF-UF at its Monday, March 14 Council Meeting.