

Ben Burnside

Public Comment for Geothermal Community Workshop at Bellingham WA Whatcom Community College

I would like to thank the organizers and all who attended the Geothermal Community workshop on 2/26/2026, I would like to provide my thoughts on the workshop and the topic. To begin with I was very pleased with the inclusion of community and tribal voices into the process of creating a geothermal energy plant in Washington. The use of unnamed sticky note comments on the various boards was a fantastic way to allow for easy communication of those present, especially those who may not be willing or able to provide their thoughts more openly. The meeting coordinators effectively allowed for vigorous discussion while knowing when to move forward with the workshop without silencing people's voices. As far as the topic itself is concerned the introduction of geothermal energy in Washington could provide a clean renewable energy source to supplement our high levels of hydroelectric power.

As far as concerns I have for the meeting and the topic, I feel as though not enough information was known about how the various geothermal plants truly function, ex: what can cause a plant to be discontinued/fall out of use. Additionally, while the thoroughness of the multi-step program to introduce geothermal energy is extremely comprehensive there are still concerns. The primary is the timeframe. In the meeting it was stating the implementation of geothermal energy was a decade or multi decade long process, seeing as how we are only in preliminary stages it is worth noting two important points:

1. The communities consulted will have changed by the time any change truly begins
2. More efficient power sources may have begun their own implementation by the time construction is finished such as nuclear fusion, making the entire process moot.

Lastly there are concerns about geothermal itself, while the technology is generally quite safe, clean, and a good supplier of jobs and resources to a community there can be drawbacks depending on the method used. While advanced and normal geothermal has nearly no drawbacks other than minor upheaval of, and interference with, local ecology, there are some more risks with enhanced geothermal systems. EGS use a version of hydraulic fracturing to enhance geothermal energy availability and use in the area and create a perfect artificial site for a geothermal power plant. Geothermal fracking is significantly less harmful than oil or gas fracking but can still cause earthquakes and can theoretically contaminate local water. This risk is highly mitigated by the fact that EGS use few chemical additives and often have closed loop systems resulting in very little waste fluid. As has been seen in much of the central united states waste fluid buildup is the primary cause of fracking induced earthquakes. That is not to say the risks are none but they are far lower than many other methods of power generation. I once again thank the organizers and attendees as well as all departments involved in this process for a lovely meeting and providing an opportunity to express my opinions.