



U.S. Department of Agriculture
Northeastern Area
State and Private Forestry



**WOOD EDUCATION
AND
RESOURCE CENTER**

310 Hardwood Lane
Princeton, WV 24740
304-487-1510
www.na.fs.fed.us/werc

Preliminary Feasibility Report

Biomass Heating Analysis for Brasher Falls Central School District

Brasher Falls, New York

Prepared by:

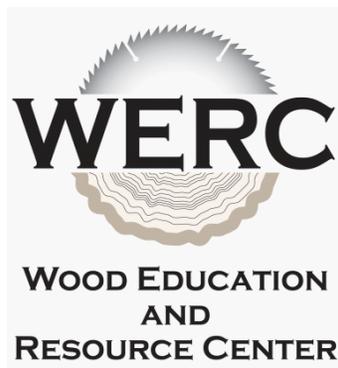


YELLOW WOOD
associates, inc.
228 North Main Street
St. Albans, VT 05478
Phone: (802)524-6141
www.yellowwood.org

Richmond Energy Associates, LLC

2899 Hinesburg Road
Richmond, VT 05477
Phone: (802) 434-3770





The Wood Education and Resource Center is located in Princeton, W.Va., and administered by the Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry unit of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service. The Center's mission is to work with the forest products industry toward sustainable forest products production for the eastern hardwood forest region. It provides state-of-the-art training, technology transfer, networking opportunities, applied research, and information. Visit www.na.fs.fed.us/werc for more information about the Center.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write to USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, or call (800) 795-3272 (voice) or (202) 720-6382 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

The information contained herein creates no warranty either express or implied. The USDA Forest Service, its officers, employees, and project partners assume no liability for its contents or use thereof. Use of this information is at the sole discretion of the user.

Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
INTRODUCTION.....	6
ANALYSIS ASSUMPTIONS.....	6
DESCRIPTION OF THE EXISTING HEATING SYSTEM	6
DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED BIOMASS SYSTEM	7
LIFE CYCLE COST METHODOLOGY	9
FUEL OIL COST ASSUMPTIONS.....	10
NATURAL GAS COST ASSUMPTIONS.....	10
WOODCHIP FUEL COST ASSUMPTIONS.....	10
INFLATION ASSUMPTIONS.....	11
OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE ASSUMPTIONS	12
STATE SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION AID	12
FINANCING ASSUMPTIONS.....	13
BIOMASS SCENARIO ANALYSIS.....	14
ADDITIONAL ISSUES TO CONSIDER.....	17
ENERGY MANAGEMENT	17
ENERGY EFFICIENCY.....	17
COMMISSIONING	17
HOT WATER VS. STEAM HEATING DISTRIBUTION	18
PROJECT FUNDING POSSIBILITIES	19
USDA FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES.....	19
QUALIFIED SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION BOND.....	19
MUNICIPAL LEASE / PURCHASE	20
CARBON OFFSETS.....	20
PERMITTING.....	22
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	25
APPENDICES.....	28
DISCUSSION OF BIOMASS FUELS.....	28
BIOMASS FUEL SUPPLIERS.....	31

List of Figures

<i>Figure 1: Annual Fuel Use</i>	7
<i>Figure 2: Proposed Biomass Boiler Location</i>	7
<i>Figure 3: Williamstown, VT High School Woodchip Boiler Plant</i>	8
<i>Figure 4: Woodchip and Fossil Fuel Inflation</i>	11
<i>Figure 5: Annual Cash Flow Graph for Woodchip Scenario</i>	15
<i>Figure 6: Carbon Cycle Illustration</i>	21
<i>Figure 7: Particulate Emissions</i>	23

List of Tables

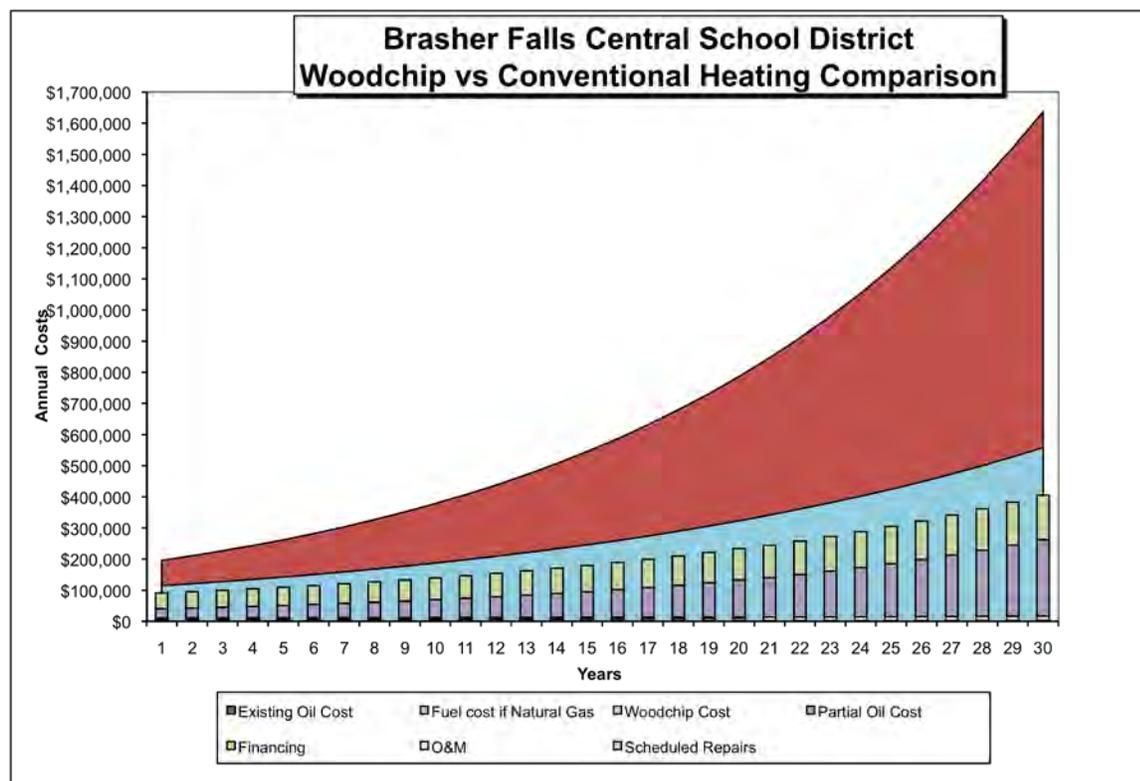
<i>Table 1: Woodchip Scenario Analysis Assumptions</i>	14
<i>Table 2: 30-Year Life Cycle Analysis Spreadsheet for Woodchip Scenario</i>	16
<i>Table 3: Comparison of Boiler Emissions Fired by Woodchips and Distillate Oil</i>	22

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Brasher Falls Central School District is a school campus housing an Elementary School, Middle/High School and Bus Garage located in Brasher Falls, New York. The school has approximately 225,000 square feet of conditioned space in these three buildings, which are all heated by three steam boilers located in the high school. All three boilers use #2 fuel oil. The two main boilers are approximately 32 years old and maintenance staff report that they are in fair condition. One smaller (back-up) boiler providing mainly hot water was installed in 2010. The two main boilers are fully depreciated and the analysis in this report assumes that the district will receive 98% state school construction aid for the project. School officials should consult with the New York State Department of Education before embarking on any construction project to determine eligibility for state school construction aid.

The district currently uses approximately 81,500 gallons of fuel oil on average each year. The average price paid by the school over the past two years was \$2.08 per gallon. The school has locked in a price of \$2.40 per gallon for the 2010-2011 school year and at that price the district will spend more than \$195,000 on fuel oil this coming year.

The analysis provided in this report indicates that the Brasher Falls Central School District could save nearly \$8 million in operating costs over 30 years in today's dollars even when the cost of financing is included. The analysis shows more than \$115,000 in fuel savings in the first year alone.



The Brasher Falls Central School District appears to be an excellent candidate for a woodchip heating system. There is space immediately outside the existing boiler room to install a boiler house for the new woodchip boiler and chip storage. The existing boiler systems could work well to provide back-up and supplemental heat in combination with a wood fired boiler. We recommend the Brasher Falls Central School District take the following steps to investigate this opportunity further:

1. Hire an engineering firm to help refine the project concept and to obtain firm local estimates on project costs.
2. The district should consider upgrading the existing steam distribution system in the high school to a hot water distribution system regardless of whether a biomass system is installed. Costs for upgrading from steam to hot water heating distribution were not included in the analysis because it was beyond the scope of this study. A project of that nature will require a careful engineering study to determine the best equipment alternatives and to estimate costs. However, hot water distribution is typically easier to maintain, is more energy efficient and provides a more comfortable heat than steam. It is likely that the fuel cost savings from a biomass project will more than offset the costs of converting to a hot water distribution system.
3. Emission regulations for commercial boilers will be changing in the near future. The EPA is undergoing a public review process for draft rules that could affect the type of equipment specified for a site like this. An allowance for pollution control equipment was included in the analysis for this report. The engineers hired by the district for a biomass project should carefully review the new rules and evaluate the best available technology options for pollution control devices when they are designing this project.
4. The US Forest Service may be able to provide some engineering technical assistance from an engineering team with biomass experience that is part of the program that funded this study. If the district moves forward with this project, they should contact Lew McCreery, the US Forest Service Biomass Coordinator for the Northeastern Area to see what assistance can be provided. His contact information is: 304-285-1538, lmccreery@fs.fed.us
5. Regardless of whether Brasher Falls moves forward with a biomass district energy system, it should consider energy efficiency improvements. The efficiency of the building envelope and ventilation equipment need to be considered when sizing new boiler equipment. The New York State Energy and Research Authority (NYSERDA) and/or the New York Power Authority (NYPA) should be engaged to develop comprehensive energy efficiency recommendations and proposals for incentives for efficiency upgrades before undertaking a major building project. This should be done regardless of whether or not the district moves ahead with a biomass project at this time. Information on energy efficiency programs is included in the Resource Binder accompanying this report.
6. In order to effectively measure progress toward energy efficiency goals historical energy consumption data should be collected and updated frequently. There are many tools to help the district accomplish this. One such tool is the EPA Energy Star *Portfolio Manager* software. It is

free public domain software that helps facility managers track energy and water use. This software can be downloaded at:

http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=evaluate_performance.bus_portfoliomanager

7. Concurrent with the design of a biomass project, Potsdam should investigate potential woodchip fuel providers. The New York State Forest Utilization Program maintains an up to date list of biomass fuel suppliers. Their contact information is included in the appendices at the end of this report.

This preliminary feasibility study was prepared by Yellow Wood Associates in collaboration with Richmond Energy Associates for the Brasher Falls Central School District. Both Yellow Wood and Richmond Energy have extensive community economic development experience and Richmond Energy specializes in biomass energy projects. This study was funded by the Wood Education and Resource Center, Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

INTRODUCTION

There is a significant volume of low-grade biomass in the United States that represents a valuable economic and environmental opportunity if it can be constructively used to produce energy. Commercially available biomass heating systems can provide heat cleanly and efficiently in many commercial applications. Biomass heating technologies are being used quite successfully in over 40 public schools in Vermont alone and the concept of heating institutions with wood is catching on in several other areas of the United States and Canada. Good candidate facilities for biomass energy systems include those that have high heating bills, those that have either steam or hot water heating distribution systems and those that have ready access to reasonably priced biomass fuel.

This report is a pre-feasibility assessment specifically tailored to the Brasher Falls Central School District outlining whether or not woodchip heating makes sense for their St. Lawrence campus facility from a practical perspective. In June 2010, staff from Yellow Wood Associates traveled to Brasher Falls, NY to tour the campus. This assessment includes site-specific fuel savings projections based on historic fuel consumption, and provides facility decision-makers suggestions and recommendations on next steps.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture Wood Education and Resource Center funded the study.

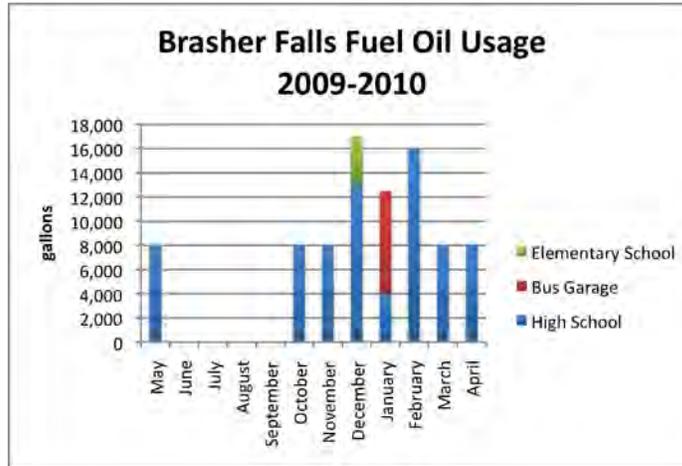
This preliminary feasibility study was prepared by Yellow Wood Associates and Richmond Energy Associates, LLC.

ANALYSIS ASSUMPTIONS

DESCRIPTION OF THE EXISTING HEATING SYSTEM

The Brasher Falls Central School District is a small campus serving grades K-12 with a Middle/High School, Elementary School and Bus Garage in Brasher Falls, NY. The district houses approximately 1,066 students and staff in the 139,842 square foot Middle/High School and the 73,228 square foot Elementary School. In 1998 a loop heating system was put in to connect the three campus buildings. The buildings are now all heated by a central boiler plant located in the Middle/High School that includes two 10 mmBtu Cleaver Brooks low-pressure steam boilers that use #2 fuel oil. An additional small steam back-up boiler (also using #2 fuel oil) was installed in 2010. The two main boilers were purchased in 1978 and are in fair working condition. The Middle/High School still use steam distribution while the heating in the gymnasium, bus garage and elementary school are served by hot water distribution. Over the past two years, the district used an average of 81,500 gallons of fuel oil to heat these three buildings annually.

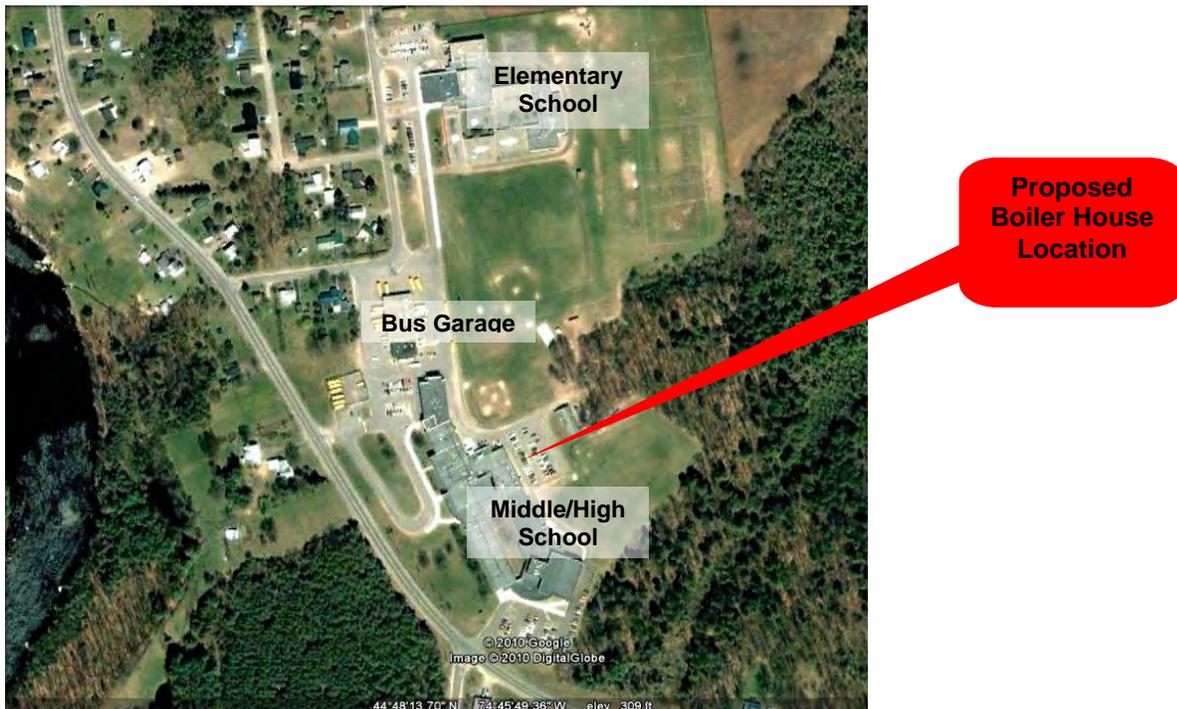
Figure 1: Annual Fuel Use



DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED BIOMASS SYSTEM

The biomass scenario envisions building a 2,500 square foot stand-alone boiler house and chip storage facility, which would house a 6.0 mmBtu woodchip hot water boiler, woodchip fuel storage and fuel handling equipment to feed the boiler automatically. The scenario assumes the existing fuel oil boilers would remain to provide back-up heat for the shoulder seasons and supplemental heat during the coldest days of the year if necessary. Figure 2 shows the suggested boiler house location.

Figure 2: Proposed Biomass Boiler Location



Hot water from the woodchip boiler house would be tied into the exiting HVAC systems. While we are recommending that the district consider upgrading the existing steam distribution system in the Middle/High schools, those costs were not included in this study. Determining the costs for a hot water distribution upgrade was beyond the scope of this project. But hot water heat distribution is typically easier to maintain, is more energy efficient and provides a more comfortable heat for occupants than steam. The district should consider upgrading their steam distribution system regardless of whether they undertake a biomass energy project or not.

Costs for a tall stack were included to ensure good emissions dispersal. Costs for an underground woodchip storage bin were included, as below grade chip storage bins are less likely to freeze in the coldest winter weather and chip delivery using self unloading trailers into below grade bins is fast and easy.

Figure 3: Williamstown, VT High School Woodchip Boiler Plant



A thermal storage system is included in the capital cost estimate for this study. In this case the thermal storage system includes a large, insulated hot water tank and ancillary piping and pumps that connect the insulated storage tank to the wood fired boiler and to the buildings heating system. Heat from the wood boiler is stored in the water in the insulated tank until needed by the building system. This allows the boiler to operate in a high fire state at peak efficiency and then be turned off or to go into a stand-by mode where a minimal amount of fuel is being burned. This improved efficiency means fuel savings and reduced emissions. The thermal storage system also allows peak load shaving and as a result a smaller combustion system can be installed. The stored energy in the tank provides a buffer for peak loads during the day. The boiler loads energy into the tank during periods of low demand. When periods of peak demand occur, the energy stored in the tank responds immediately to the buildings demand while the wood-fired boiler is reaching a "high fire" state. Then the boiler provides the additional energy

required to meet the peak demand. In commercial or school settings these peak demand periods are often periods of maximum air exchange with the outdoors.

Additional benefits of the thermal storage system include the ability to extend the operation of the wood combustion system during warmer spring and fall periods, and in some cases, to address summer domestic hot water needs. Additionally solar thermal energy systems can be connected to the storage tank. In fact such combi-systems are often used in Europe to meet summer domestic hot water needs and increase overall system efficiency.

A healthy construction contingency, standard general contractor mark-up and professional design fees were also included. Figure 3 is an example of the type of recommended building.

LIFE CYCLE COST METHODOLOGY

Decision makers need practical methods for evaluating the economic performance of alternative choices for any given purchasing decision. When making a choice between mutually exclusive capital investments, it is prudent to compare all equipment and operating costs spent over the life of the longest-lived alternative in order to determine the true least cost choice. The total cost of acquisition, fuel costs, operation and maintenance of an item throughout its useful life is known as its “life cycle cost.” Life cycle costs that should be considered in a life cycle cost analysis include:

- Capital costs for purchasing and installing equipment
- Fuel costs
- Inflation for fuels, operational labor and major repairs
- Annual operation and maintenance costs including scheduled major repairs
- Salvage costs of equipment and buildings at the end of the analysis period

It is useful for decision makers to consider the impact of debt service if the project is to be financed in order to get a clearer picture of how a project might affect annual budgets. When viewed in this light, equipment with significant capital costs may still be the least-cost alternative. In some cases, a significant capital investment may actually lower annual expenses, if there are sufficient fuel savings to offset debt service and any incremental increases in operation and maintenance costs.

The analysis performed for this facility compares different scenarios over a 30-year horizon and takes into consideration life cycle cost factors. A 30-year time frame is used because it is the expected life of a new boiler.

The alternative biomass scenario envisions installing a new woodchip heating system that would serve all three schools in the Brasher Falls Central School District. The scenario includes all ancillary equipment and interconnection costs. Under the biomass scenario, the existing heating equipment would still be used to provide supplemental heat during the coldest days of the year if necessary and potentially for the

warmer shoulder season months when buildings only require minimal heating during chilly weather. The district may be able to retire one of their older boilers if they install a redundant biomass boiler.

The analysis projects current and future annual fuel oil heating bills and compares that cost against the cost of operating a biomass system. Savings are presented in today's dollars using a net present value calculation. Net present value (NPV) is defined as the present dollar value of net cash flows over time. This is a standard method for using the time value of money to compare the cost effectiveness of long-term projects.

It is not the intent of this project, nor was it in the scope of work, to develop detailed cost estimates for a biomass boiler facility. It is recommended for a project of this scale, that the district hire a qualified design team to refine the project concept and to develop firm local cost estimates. Therefore the capital costs used for the biomass scenario are generic estimates based on our experience with similar scale projects.

FUEL OIL COST ASSUMPTIONS

Fuel bills provided by the Brasher Falls Central School District indicate that Brasher Falls uses an average of 81,500 gallons of fuel oil per year to heat the school building being considered in this analysis. This is the assumed annual fuel consumption used for the base case in the analysis. Over the past two years, Brasher Falls paid an average of \$2.08 per gallon for fuel oil but the school has locked in a price of \$2.40 per gallon for the upcoming school year. The biomass scenario in this study uses \$2.40 per gallon for the first year of the analysis. At that price, Brasher Falls will spend more than \$195,000 for fuel oil to heat this campus next year.

NATURAL GAS COST ASSUMPTIONS

It is our understanding that the Brasher Falls Central School District might get access to natural gas in the near future. To account for this possibility, the equivalent volume of natural gas was included in the analysis as an alternative. The price for natural gas used for this analysis was \$1.09 per therm which was the average price paid for all of the schools analyzed in the Drum Country area.

WOODCHIP FUEL COST ASSUMPTIONS

Frequently, operators of institutional woodchip systems don't fire up their biomass boilers until there is constant demand for building heat. During the fall and spring, fossil fuel boilers are often used as they are easier to start up and turn down. Woodchip boilers are then typically used in place of fossil fuel boilers for the bulk of the winter heating season. In Vermont where there are over 40 schools that heat with wood, the average annual wood utilization is about 85%. The woodchip scenario in this study assumes the facility will meet 85% of the winter heating needs for the school with woodchips and therefore consume 1,024 tons of chips per year.

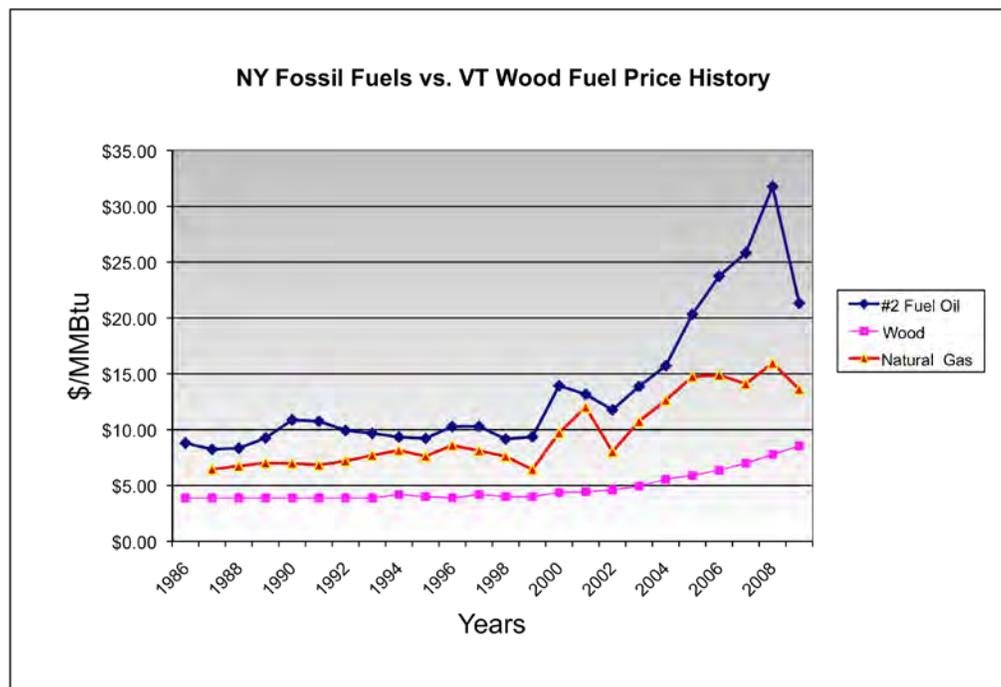
After consulting with other woodchip users in the region, we are projecting a first year cost of \$50 per ton for woodchips, which is equivalent to about \$0.65 per gallon for fuel oil. The remaining 15% of the heating needs were then assumed to be provided by the existing fuel oil or natural gas units consuming about 12,225 gallons of fuel oil or 15,770 therms of natural gas respectively. The costs for supplemental heating fuel are then adjusted for inflation each year over the 30-year horizon.

INFLATION ASSUMPTIONS

Estimating future fuel costs over time is difficult at best. Over the past few years it has become even more difficult as fuel prices have fluctuated dramatically. Nevertheless, in order to more accurately reflect future costs in a thirty-year analysis, some rate of inflation needs to be applied to future fuel costs.

We looked retrospectively over the last 20 years (1990 – 2009) using US Energy Information Agency data and found that the average annual increase for Fuel Oil in New York was 7.6% per year. Using the same methodology, natural gas averaged 5.6% per year over the same twenty-year period. The analysis projects these average inflation rates for fuel oil and natural gas forward over the thirty-year analysis period.

Figure 4: Woodchip and Fossil Fuel Inflation



The overall Consumer Price Index for the period between 1990 and 2009, the last year for which full data is available, increased an average of 2.6% annually. This is the annual inflation rate that was used in projecting all future labor costs, operations and maintenance costs and scheduled major repair costs for the biomass scenario.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE ASSUMPTIONS

It is typical for operators of fully automated woodchip heating systems of this size to spend 15-30 minutes per day to clean ashes¹ and to check on pumps, motors and controls. For the woodchip scenario, it was assumed that existing on-site staff would spend on average approximately one half hour per day in addition to their current boiler maintenance for 150 days per year and 20 hours during the summer months for routine maintenance. At a loaded labor rate of \$25/hr, this equals \$2,375 annually. An additional \$4,250 in annual operational costs is assumed for electricity to run pumps, motors and pollution control equipment.

Another operations and maintenance cost that is included in the analysis is periodic repair or replacement of major items on the boiler such as the furnace refractory. It is reasonable to anticipate these types of costs on a 10-15 year cycle. For this analysis, \$15,000 of scheduled maintenance was anticipated in years 10, 20 and 30 and then annualized at \$1,500 per year to simulate a sinking fund for major repairs. This \$1,500 was then inflated at the general annual inflation rate.

Under any biomass scenario, a case could be made that the existing heating units will require less maintenance and may last longer since they will only be used for a small portion of the heating season. However, all heating equipment should be serviced at least annually no matter how much it is used. Additionally it is very difficult to estimate how long the replacement of the existing units might be delayed. For these reasons, no additional annual maintenance, scheduled repair or planned replacement costs for the existing fuel oil boilers were taken into consideration as these are considered costs that the facility would have paid anyway. It was assumed that all costs for the operation and maintenance of a biomass boiler are incremental additional costs.

STATE SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION AID

Biomass boilers are eligible for New York State school construction aid. However, the New York Facilities Planning Division for the State Department of Education (SED) does not like to fund new boilers until the existing boilers are fully depreciated. SED generally considers boilers fully depreciated after fifteen years although they do recognize that boilers can last a good deal longer. Since the facility's two main boilers are over 30 years old, the school may be eligible for state school construction aid for a biomass boiler. The district should consult state officials about any planned construction project and get their determination on state aid directly from SED.

It is our understanding that the Brasher Falls Central School District is eligible for 98% state school construction aid. For the analysis in this report, it was assumed that this project would receive state school construction aid and that the local district would finance the remainder of the project.

¹ Wood ash is generally not considered a hazardous material in most states and can be landfilled or land applied as a soil amendment by farmers or on-site maintenance staff.

FINANCING ASSUMPTIONS

Financing costs were included in the analysis to give district decision makers a sense of how this project may impact their annual budget. Public schools typically have access to long-term, low interest bond financing. It was assumed that the Brasher Falls Central School District would be able to obtain a 20 year bond for the capital costs for the biomass project at an interest rate of 3%. The bond payment schedule that was used has fixed principal payments and variable interest payments. Other financing schedules could create even more favorable cash flows depending on how much of the project costs are financed and how the remaining financing is structured. If the district were to forego financing and pay for the project outright, the annual savings would be greater.

BIOMASS SCENARIO ANALYSIS

The analysis shows that the district could save nearly \$8 million in today's dollars in operating costs over the next 30 years over the cost of fuel oil by installing a woodchip heating system, even including debt service on the local share cost of the system. Annual fuel savings alone are project to be more than \$115,000 per year in the first year and should increase over time as fuel oil prices continue to climb. If the school converts to natural gas, the savings would be considerably less, but still positive. Annual fuel cost savings would be more than \$46,000 per year and the 30 year NPV savings would be well over \$2 million.

Table 1: Woodchip Scenario Analysis Assumptions

Brasher Falls Central School District			
Capital Cost Assumptions			
6.0 mmBtu woodchip hot water boiler system including installation			\$600,000
70 ft stack			\$35,000
Pollution control equipment			\$100,000
Biomass boilerhouse and chip storage building	\$150 /SF	2,500 SF	\$375,000
Thermal storage 6,000 gallon			\$60,000
Interconnect to existing boiler system			\$75,000
GC markup at 10%			\$124,500
Construction contingency at 15%			\$205,425
Design at 12%			\$188,991
Total estimated project costs			\$1,763,916
State Aid at	98%		\$1,728,638
Total Local Share			\$35,278
Financing Costs			
Financing, annual interest rate			3.00%
Finance term (years)			20
1st full year debt service			\$2,822
Fuel Cost Assumptions			
Current annual fuel oil consumption in gallons			81,500
Assumed fuel oil price per gallon			\$2.40
Projected annual fuel oil bill			\$195,600
Equivalent natural gas consumption in therms			105,135
Assumed price per therm			\$1.09
Projected annual natural gas bill			\$114,597
Assumed woodchip price in 1st year (per ton)			\$50
Projected 1st year woodchip fuel bill			\$51,214
Projected 1 st year supplemental fuel oil bill			\$29,340
Projected 1st year supplemental natural gas bill if the school converted to natural gas			\$17,190
Inflation Assumptions			
General inflation rate (twenty year average CPI)			2.6%
Fuel oil inflation rate (twenty year average US EIA)			7.6%
Natural gas inflation rate (twenty year average US EIA)			5.6%
Woodchip inflation rate (average increase in VT from 1988 - 2008 for woodchips was 3.6%)			3.6%
O&M Assumptions			
Annual woodchip O&M cost, including electricity and staff time for daily and yearly maintenance			\$6,625
Major repairs (annualized)			\$1,500
Savings			
Net 1st year fuel savings over fuel oil			\$115,046
Total 30 year NPV cumulative savings			\$7,907,233
Net 1st year fuel savings over natural gas if school converted to natural gas			\$46,194
Total 30 year NPV cumulative savings over natural gas			\$2,289,593

Figure 5: Annual Cash Flow Graph for Woodchip Scenario

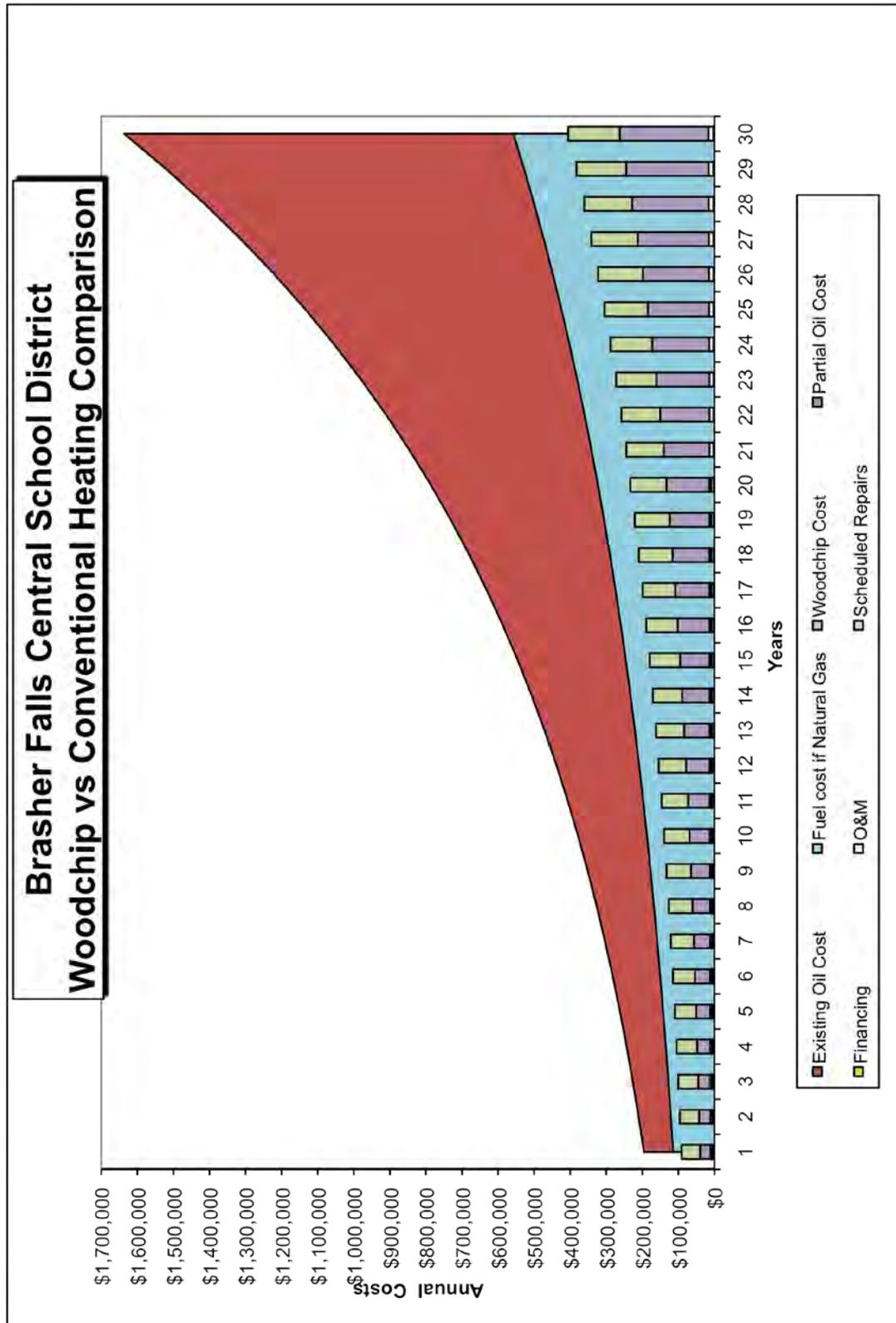


Table 2: 30-Year Life Cycle Analysis Spreadsheet for Woodchip Scenario

Brasher Falls Central School District		Preliminary Life Cycle Cost Estimate		Fully-Automated Woodchip - Heat Only							
Total estimated construction costs		\$1,763,916	Estimated state aid	\$1,728,638							
Local Share:		\$35,278									
Financing:		3.0%	Assumed interest rate each year, 20 years	15%, oil =	68 gal. / ton of woodchips						
Oil heat consumption		81,500	12,225 gallons	1,205 tons if 100% woodchips for oil							
Oil heat price		\$2.40									
Oil heat cost		\$195,600									
Estimated woodchip utilization		85%									
Projected woodchip consumption		1,024 tons									
Estimated 1st year woodchip price		\$50 / ton Year 1									
Projected 1st year woodchip cost		\$51,214									
Projected 1st year partial fuel oil cost		\$29,340									
Equivalent Natural Gas consumption		105,135	15,770 therms	1,202 tons if 100% woodchips for NG	88 therms/ton of woodchips						
Projected first year price of Natural Gas		\$1.09 /therm in year 1									
Projected first year cost of Natural Gas		\$114,597									
General Inflation:		2.6% annually									
Oil Inflation:		7.6% annually									
Woodchip Inflation:		3.6% annually									
Natural Gas Inflation:		5.6% annually									
O & M:		\$6,625 in Year 1 \$									
Major Repairs:		\$1,500									
Yr.	Oil Cost	IF/NG Cost	Woodchip Cost	Partial NG Cost	Partial O&M Repairs	Total Annual Cashflow	Cumulative Cashflow				
1	\$195,600	\$114,597	\$51,214	\$17,190	\$6,625	\$1,500	\$104,099				
2	\$210,466	\$121,024	\$53,058	\$18,154	\$6,797	\$1,539	\$218,831				
3	\$226,461	\$127,812	\$54,988	\$19,247	\$6,974	\$1,579	\$345,086				
4	\$243,672	\$134,980	\$56,947	\$20,272	\$7,155	\$1,620	\$483,821				
5	\$262,191	\$142,550	\$58,997	\$21,363	\$7,341	\$1,662	\$636,073				
6	\$282,118	\$150,545	\$61,121	\$22,582	\$7,532	\$1,705	\$802,957				
7	\$303,559	\$158,989	\$63,321	\$23,848	\$7,728	\$1,750	\$985,678				
8	\$326,629	\$167,905	\$65,600	\$25,186	\$7,929	\$1,795	\$1,185,536				
9	\$351,453	\$177,322	\$67,962	\$26,598	\$8,135	\$1,842	\$1,403,933				
10	\$378,163	\$187,267	\$70,409	\$28,090	\$8,347	\$1,890	\$1,642,381				
11	\$406,904	\$197,770	\$72,943	\$29,666	\$8,564	\$1,939	\$1,902,510				
12	\$437,828	\$208,862	\$75,569	\$31,329	\$8,786	\$1,989	\$2,186,079				
13	\$471,103	\$220,576	\$78,290	\$33,086	\$9,015	\$2,041	\$2,494,963				
14	\$506,907	\$232,947	\$81,108	\$34,942	\$9,249	\$2,094	\$2,831,268				
15	\$545,432	\$246,012	\$84,028	\$36,902	\$9,490	\$2,149	\$3,197,138				
16	\$586,885	\$259,809	\$87,053	\$38,971	\$9,736	\$2,204	\$3,594,967				
17	\$631,488	\$274,381	\$90,187	\$41,157	\$9,989	\$2,262	\$4,027,318				
18	\$679,481	\$289,769	\$93,434	\$43,465	\$10,249	\$2,321	\$4,496,951				
19	\$731,122	\$306,021	\$96,798	\$45,903	\$10,516	\$2,381	\$5,006,840				
20	\$786,687	\$323,184	\$100,282	\$48,478	\$10,789	\$2,443	\$5,560,193				
21	\$846,475	\$341,309	\$103,892	\$51,196	\$11,070	\$2,506	\$6,162,229				
22	\$910,807	\$360,452	\$107,633	\$54,068	\$11,357	\$2,571	\$6,814,854				
23	\$980,029	\$380,667	\$111,507	\$57,100	\$11,653	\$2,638	\$7,522,080				
24	\$1,054,511	\$402,017	\$115,522	\$60,303	\$11,956	\$2,707	\$8,288,230				
25	\$1,134,654	\$424,564	\$119,680	\$63,685	\$12,267	\$2,777	\$9,117,961				
26	\$1,220,887	\$448,375	\$123,989	\$67,256	\$12,585	\$2,850	\$9,998,330				
27	\$1,313,675	\$473,522	\$128,452	\$71,028	\$12,913	\$2,924	\$10,968,626				
28	\$1,413,514	\$500,090	\$133,077	\$75,012	\$13,248	\$3,000	\$12,040,751				
29	\$1,520,941	\$528,127	\$137,868	\$79,219	\$13,593	\$3,078	\$13,179,051				
30	\$1,636,533	\$557,746	\$142,831	\$83,662	\$13,946	\$3,158	\$14,410,169				
Totals	\$20,595,175	\$6,459,183	\$2,687,740	\$3,089,426	\$295,535	\$6,614	\$6,166,006				
	\$11,518,942	\$4,909,953	\$1,624,794	\$1,727,841	\$182,479	\$41,316	\$3,611,709				
30 Yr. NPV at 3%							\$7,907,233				
Total Annual Heating Costs	Woodchip Fuel /Year	Partial Fuel First Year	Woodchip System O&M /yr	Contingency Allowance /Year	Woodchip + Fuel + O&M + Contingency	Annual Fuel Oil Cost Savings	Annual Natural Gas Cost Savings	Local Share Cost	Simple Payback (yrs)	30 Yr. NPV Savings Over Oil	30 Yr. NPV Savings Over NG
\$195,600	\$51,214	\$29,340	\$6,625	\$1,500	\$88,679	\$115,046	\$46,194	\$35,278	0.3	\$7,907,233	\$2,289,593

ADDITIONAL ISSUES TO CONSIDER

ENERGY MANAGEMENT

In order to effectively manage energy use and to identify efficiency opportunities in buildings it is very important to track energy usage. Unless energy consumption is measured over time, it is difficult or impossible to know the impact of efficiency improvements or renewable energy investments. The Environmental Protection Agency developed a public domain software program called *Portfolio Manager* that can track and assess energy and water consumption across an entire portfolio of buildings. *Portfolio Manager* can help set efficiency priorities, identify under-performing buildings, verify efficiency improvements, and receive EPA recognition for superior energy performance. Richmond Energy recommends that the school input several years' worth of energy and water use data into *Portfolio Manager* as soon as it can. The EPA *Portfolio Manager* software can be downloaded at the following address:

http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=evaluate_performance.bus_portfoliomanager

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Whether Brasher Falls converts to biomass or stays with fuel oil, the school should use its heating fuel efficiently. The New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) and/or the New York Power Authority (NYPA) can help identify and prioritize appropriate energy efficiency projects that will improve the school's infrastructure and save money. Both of these agencies can help with the evaluation of energy efficiency opportunities and provide financial incentives to upgrade and improve equipment efficiencies. If the school decides to move forward with a biomass energy project, it should work with one of these agencies to identify other efficiency projects that could be completed at the same time.

General information on NYSERDA and NYPA programs is included in the *Biomass and Green Building Resources* binder accompanying this report.

To give an idea of the benefits of energy efficiency in schools, an Energy Efficiency Case Study for the U-32 Junior/Senior High School is included in the *Biomass and Green Building Resources* binder accompanying this report.

COMMISSIONING

Commissioning of a new system provides quality assurance, identifies potential equipment problems early on and provides financial savings on utility and maintenance costs during system operations. A recent study of 224 buildings found that the energy savings from commissioning new buildings had a payback period of less than five years. Additional benefits of commissioning include: improved indoor air quality, fewer deficiencies and increased system reliability. We strongly recommend that the Brasher

Falls Central School District work with an independent, third-party, commissioning agent during the design and construction of a biomass heating system. See the *Biomass and Green Building Resources* binder for more information on commissioning.

HOT WATER VS. STEAM HEATING DISTRIBUTION

Regardless of whether the district moves forward with a biomass energy project, it should consider upgrading the Middle/High School to a hot water heating distribution system. The existing steam system is aging and will only develop more maintenance issues over time. Hot water heat distribution is generally easier to maintain, is easier to control and is a more comfortable heat source than steam. It is also more energy efficient because the distribution water temperature can be adjusted easily. When it is very cold outside, the water temperature can be high which provides more heat. When the outdoor temperature is only cool, then the distribution temperature can be set back to provide some heat, but not too much.

The costs for converting the existing heat distribution system were not included in the analysis for this report because estimating those costs were beyond the scope of this project. In addition, these are costs that could be incurred regardless of the choice of boiler fuels. Nevertheless, we recommend the district consider converting to a hot water heat distribution system in the near future.

In fact, we recommend the district considering upgrading its entire heating distribution system as part of a biomass conversion project. The least costly time to deal with heating distribution upgrades is at the time of conversion. The design team will need to evaluate the condition and efficiency of the distribution system when sizing a new boiler system anyway and if improvements can be made, then it is possible to save money on boiler equipment.

PROJECT FUNDING POSSIBILITIES

USDA FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

2008 Farm Bill

The 2008 Farm Bill has a number of provisions that may help rural communities consider and implement renewable energy and energy efficiency projects.

- ❖ **Section 9009** provides grants for the purpose of enabling rural communities to increase their energy self-sufficiency.
- ❖ **Section 9013** provides grants to state and local governments to acquire wood energy systems.

These grants and loan guarantee programs are competitive. The rules governing the program and the application dates have not yet been released. The state should check with their local USDA office to express interest and to get program roll-out updates.

Rural Community Facilities Grant and Loan Program

The USDA provides grants and loans to assist the development of essential community facilities. Grants can be used to construct, enlarge or improve community facilities for health care, public safety and other community and public services. The amount of grant assistance depends on the median household income and the population of the community where the project is located.

These grants and loans are also competitive. Highest priority projects are those that serve small communities, those that serve low-income communities and those that are highly leveraged with other loan and grant awards.

For more information about USDA programs and services, contact your local USDA office. Information on programs and contact information is provided in the *Biomass and Green Building Resources* binder.

QUALIFIED SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION BOND

Qualified School Construction Bonds are awarded through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. These no-interest loans can be used for taxpayer approved projects to improve school facilities. The Qualified School Construction Bond program absorbs costs that would otherwise be incurred by school districts, which have issued voter-approved bonds for construction projects, effectively allowing districts to borrow funds without paying interest. Bondholders are provided with federal tax credits in lieu of the interest that would ordinarily be paid by the school districts which issues them. Through the

program, bondholders receive full return on their investment while school districts are able to finance school construction projects less expensively and jobs are created in local communities.

For more information on Qualified School Construction Bonds, contact:

Carl Thurnau

cthurau@mail.nysed.gov

(518) 474-3906

MUNICIPAL LEASE / PURCHASE

As a municipal entity, the Brasher Falls Central School District may be eligible for a municipal lease/purchase arrangement to finance the anticipated project costs for a biomass heating system. A municipal lease is a contract that has many of the characteristics of a standard commercial lease, with at least two primary differences:

- In a municipal lease, the intent of the lessee is to purchase and take title to the equipment. The financing is a full payout contract with no significant residual or balloon payments at the end of the lease term.
- The lease payments include the return of principal and interest, with the interest being exempt from Federal income taxation to the recipient. Because the interest is exempt from federal tax, a tax-exempt lease offers the lessee a significant cost savings when compared to conventional leasing.

There are a number of companies that provide municipal leases. Information on municipal leasing is included in the *Biomass and Green Building Resources* binder accompanying this report.

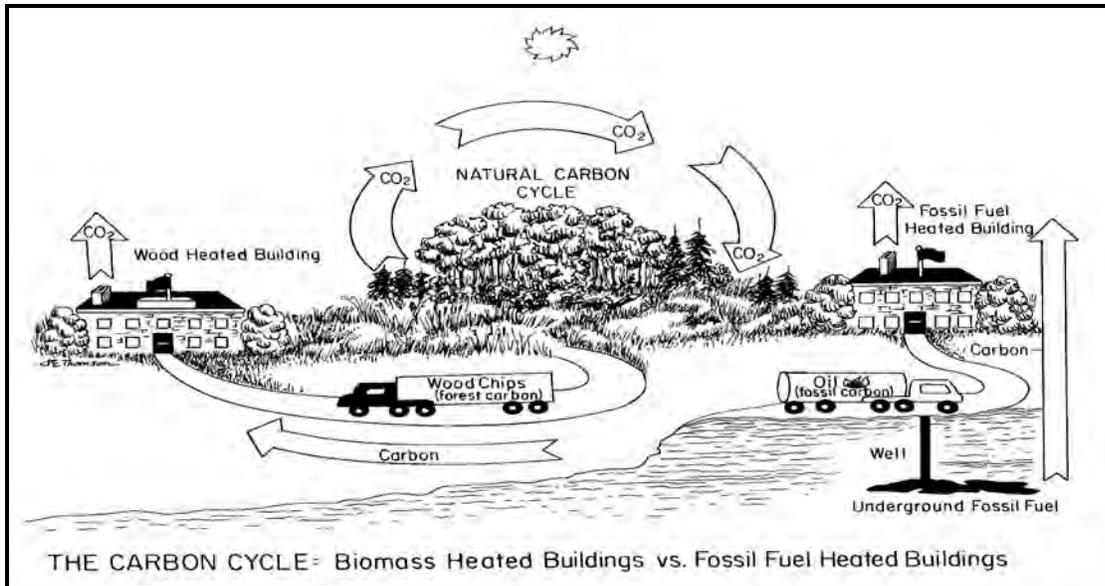
CARBON OFFSETS

While fossil fuels introduce carbon that has been sequestered for millions of years into the atmosphere, the carbon dioxide emitted from burning biomass comes from carbon that is already above the ground and in the carbon cycle. Biomass fuels typically come from the waste of some other industrial activity such as a logging operation or from sawmill production. The carbon from this waste would soon wind up in the atmosphere whether it was left to decompose or it was burned as slash. There are few measures the Brasher Falls Central School District could undertake that would reduce its carbon footprint more than switching their heating fuel use from fuel oil to a biomass fuel.

Carbon offsets help fund projects that reduce greenhouse gases emissions. Carbon offset providers sell the greenhouse gas reductions associated with projects like wind farms or biomass projects to customers who want to offset the emissions they caused by flying, driving, or using electricity. Selling offsets is a

way for some renewable energy projects to become more financially viable. Buying offsets is a way for companies and individuals to compensate for the CO₂ pollution they create.

Figure 6: Carbon Cycle Illustration²



For a biomass heat-only project, a Btu-for-Btu displacement of heating fuel (based on historic purchase records) by biomass is assumed over the project's predicted operating life. CO₂ avoidance is based on the emissions profile (Lbs. CO₂ /Btu of the displaced fuel). The US EPA calculates that 22.2 lbs. of CO₂ is produced from each gallon of fuel oil consumed. It is projected that the Brasher Falls Central School District can offset approximately 69,275 gallons of fuel oil per year by replacing that heat using biomass. This is equivalent to about 770 tons of CO₂ annually. The market value of this type of offset is between \$3/ton and \$5/ton. These offsets can be negotiated as either a lump sum offset for up to 10 years or can be paid out as an annual payment. This could mean annual payments of \$2,310 - \$3,850 or a lump sum up front payment of as much as \$23,100 to \$38,500.

There are a number of companies that are interested in contributing to the construction of new sources of clean and renewable energy through carbon offsets. Information about carbon offsets is included in the *Biomass and Green Building Resources* binder accompanying this report.

² Illustration taken from a handout produced by the Biomass Energy Resource Center

PERMITTING

Modern biomass boiler technology is both clean and efficient. Controls moderate both the biomass fuel and air to create either a small hot fire or a large hot fire depending on heat demand from the building. Under full load, modern woodchip boilers routinely operate at steady state efficiencies of 70% – 75%. Operating temperatures in commercial scale biomass boilers can reach up to 2,000 degrees and more, completely eliminating creosote and the need to clean stacks. The amount of ash produced from a 25 ton tractor trailer load of green hardwood chips can fit in a 25 gallon trash can, is not considered a hazardous waste and can be used as a soil amendment on lawns, gardens and playing fields.

However, as with any combustion process, there are emissions from biomass boilers. There is no question that natural gas is the cleanest fuel used for heating. However, biomass compares favorably with fuel oil and modern commercial scale biomass boilers with the appropriate pollution control devices can burn very cleanly and efficiently.

Table 3: Comparison of Boiler Emissions Fired by Woodchips and Distillate Oil³

	<i>(Pounds per million Btu output)</i>	
	Wood	Distillate Oil
PM ₁₀	0.1000	0.0140
NO _x	0.1650	0.1430
CO	0.7300	0.0350
SO ₂	0.0082	0.5000
TOC	0.0242	0.0039
CO ₂	gross 220 (net 0)	159

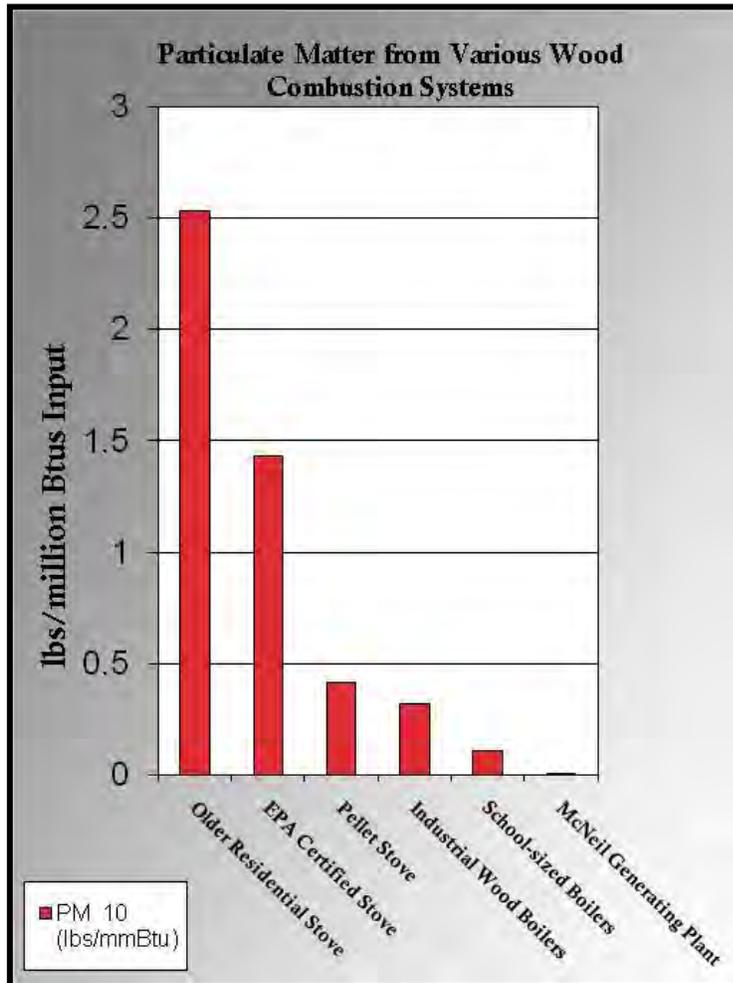
As with any combustion process, there are emissions from biomass boilers. The pollutant of greatest concern with biomass is particulates (PM₁₀). While biomass compares reasonably well with fuel oil, biomass boilers clearly generate more particulates. That is why it is important to install appropriate pollution control equipment. Many modern types of emission control equipment, capable of reducing particulate matter emissions from 50-99 percent, are commercially available in the US. The most common emission control equipment technologies are baghouses, cyclones, multi-cyclones, electrostatic precipitators, and wet scrubbers. Appropriate emission control equipment technologies should be identified in consultation with the facility's engineering design team and local air quality regulators.

The emissions from a modern woodchip boiler are much less than most people think. One of the most common misconceptions about institutional/commercial biomass energy systems comes from the

³ Data excerpted from the paper *An Evaluation of Air Pollution Control Technologies for Small Wood-Fired Boilers* prepared by Resource Systems Group, Inc. White River Jct., VT, for the New York Department of Public Service and others, Revised September 2001.

experience people have with residential wood stoves and outdoor wood boilers. In general, an institutional/commercial-scale wood energy system emits only one fifteenth (seven percent) the PM₁₀ of the average wood stove on a Btu basis. Over the course of a year, a large, woodchip heated school in a climate like Vermont may have the same particulate emissions as four or five houses heated with wood stoves.

Figure 7: Particulate Emissions⁴



New EPA Regulations

On April 29, 2010, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued a proposed rule that would reduce emissions of toxic air pollutants from existing and new industrial, commercial and institutional boilers located at area source or major source facilities. An area source facility emits or has the potential to emit less than 10 tons per year (tpy) of any single air toxic or less than 25 tpy of any combination of air toxics. The major source facility emits or has the potential to emit 10 or more tpy of any single air toxic or 25 tpy or more of any combination of air toxics.

The proposed rule would set different requirements for large and small boilers at area source facilities. Large boilers have a heat input capacity equal to or greater than 10 mmBtu/hr and small boilers have a heat input capacity less than 10 mmBtu/hr. The biomass fired

new boilers would need to meet limits for PM and CO. For the major source facility, EPA has identified 11 different subcategories of boilers and process heaters based on the design of the various types of units. The proposed rule would include specific requirements for each subcategory.

Details on the status of this proposal will be posted at www.epa.gov/airquality/combustion/

In order to install a new woodchip boiler, it is likely that the district will need to obtain an air quality permit or an amendment to an existing permit. For a woodchip boiler, the permit would likely include requirements for pollution control equipment, such as a bag house or an electrostatic precipitator along

⁴ Excerpted from a handout produced by the Biomass Energy Resource Center

with a requirement for a tall stack to help with dispersion. Costs for pollution control equipment and a 70 foot tall stack are included in the cost estimates for the woodchip scenario analyzed in this report. Other permit conditions might include testing for emissions and efficiency, keeping records of fuel consumption and test results and making periodic submittals to regulatory agencies.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Brasher Falls Central School District appears to be an excellent candidate for a woodchip heating system. There is space immediately outside the existing boiler room to install a boiler house for the new woodchip boiler and chip storage. The existing boiler systems could work well to provide back-up and supplemental heat in combination with a wood fired boiler. They have ready access to low cost woodchip fuel. We recommend the Brasher Falls Central School District take the following steps to investigate this opportunity further:

1. Hire an engineering firm to help refine the project concept and to obtain firm local estimates on project costs.
2. The district should consider upgrading the existing steam distribution system in the high school to a hot water distribution system regardless of whether a biomass system is installed. Costs for upgrading from steam to hot water heating distribution were not included in the analysis because it was beyond the scope of this study. A project of that nature will require a careful engineering study to determine the best equipment alternatives and to estimate costs. However, hot water distribution is typically easier to maintain, is more energy efficient and provides a more comfortable heat than steam. It is likely that the fuel cost savings from a biomass project will more than offset the costs of converting to a hot water distribution system.
3. Emission regulations for commercial boilers will be changing in the near future. The EPA is undergoing a public review process for draft rules that could affect the type of equipment specified for a site like this. An allowance for pollution control equipment was included in the analysis for this report. The engineers hired by the district for a biomass project should carefully review the new rules and evaluate the best available technology options for pollution control devices when they are designing this project.
4. The US Forest Service may be able to provide some engineering technical assistance from an engineering team with biomass experience that is part of the program that funded this study. If the district moves forward with this project, they should contact Lew McCreery, the US Forest Service Biomass Coordinator for the Northeastern Area to see what assistance can be provided. His contact information is: 304-285-1538, lmccreery@fs.fed.us.
5. Regardless of whether Brasher Falls moves forward with a biomass district energy system, the district should consider energy efficiency improvements. The efficiency of the building envelope and ventilation equipment need to be considered when sizing new boiler equipment. The New York State Energy and Research Authority (NYSERDA) and/or the New York Power Authority (NYPA) should be engaged to develop comprehensive energy efficiency recommendations and proposals for incentives for efficiency upgrades before undertaking a major building project. This should be done regardless of whether or not the district moves ahead with a biomass project at this time. Information on energy efficiency programs is included in the Resource Binder accompanying this report.

6. In order to effectively measure progress toward energy efficiency goals historical energy consumption data should be collected and updated frequently. There are many tools to help the district accomplish this. One such tool is the EPA Energy Star *Portfolio Manager* software. It is free public domain software that helps facility managers track energy and water use. This software can be downloaded at:
http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=evaluate_performance.bus_portfoliomanager
7. Concurrent with the design of a biomass project, Potsdam should investigate potential woodchip fuel providers. The New York State Forest Utilization Program maintains an up to date list of biomass fuel suppliers. Their contact information is included in the appendices at the end of this report.

WHO WE ARE

Yellow Wood Associates

Yellow Wood Associates (Yellow Wood) is a woman-owned small business specializing in rural community economic development since 1985. Yellow Wood has experience in green infrastructure, program evaluation, business development, market research, business plans, feasibility studies, and strategic planning for rural communities. Yellow Wood provides a range of services that include measurement training, facilitation, research, and program management.

Richmond Energy Associates

Richmond Energy Associates was created in 1997 to provide consulting services to business and organizations on energy efficiency and renewable energy program design and implementation. Richmond Energy has extensive experience in wood energy systems. Jeff Forward provides analysis and project management on specific biomass projects and works with state, regional and federal agencies to develop initiatives to promote biomass utilization around the country. In addition to his own consulting business, he is also a Senior Associate with Yellow Wood.

APPENDICES

DISCUSSION OF BIOMASS FUELS

Purchasing wood fuel is a different exercise than purchasing fuel oil. While fuel oil is delivered to the site with little interaction from facility managers, biomass fuel suppliers will need to be cultivated and educated about the type of fuel needed, its characteristics and the frequency of deliveries. Concurrently with designing a wood-energy system, facility managers should also be cultivating potential biomass fuel suppliers.

Potential wood fuel suppliers include sawmills, loggers, chip brokers and large industrial users such as paper mills or power plants. Many of these forest products producers already make woodchips for pulp and to reduce waste, but may not have much experience dealing with the needs of smaller volume customers. Woodchips produced for institutional/commercial biomass boilers have more stringent specifications than those produced for large industrial customers. And woodchip fuel may need to be delivered in different trailers.

When talking to potential woodchip fuel suppliers, it is important to have the wood fuel specification in mind. A one to three inch square chip is ideal. If possible, woodchips for institutional and commercial biomass systems will come from logs that are debarked prior to chipping because bark produces more ash which translates into a little more daily maintenance. Pieces or small branches that are six inches or longer can jam augers and conveyors which will interrupt the operation of automated fuel handling equipment. Institutional and commercial scale biomass boiler systems in the Northeast are typically designed to operate with wood fuel that is within a 35% to 45% range for moisture content.

Typically biomass systems of this scale have limited chip storage capacity which means they may need deliveries on relatively short notice. Woodchip fuel suppliers will need to be within a 100 to 150 mile radius or so of the user, the closer the better, as transportation costs will affect price. Chip deliveries are typically made in “live bottom” trailers that will self unload into below-grade chip storage bins. Therefore, potential suppliers must have access to a self-unloading trailer for deliveries.

It is possible to design a wood-energy system that uses any one of a variety of biomass fuels, but green hardwood chips make the best fuel. If it is readily available, it should be the fuel of choice. In addition, users should focus on reliability of supply and consistency of the fuel rather than just lowest cost. The goal should be to minimize maintenance and optimize system performance.

Whichever fuel is used, the fuel type needs to be part of the combustion system design process, and the wood system should be operated using the fuel it is set up to use. Ideally, sample fuel chips should be sent to the manufacturer of the biomass heating equipment so that they can design the fuel handling equipment around the type of fuel and calibrate the system properly when setting the system up. No

system handles widely varying fuel types at the same time very well. A system can be re-calibrated for a different fuel type, but the most practical approach is to stick with one fuel type, at least for a given heating season. If, for some reason, that fuel type becomes unavailable, the manufacturer of the equipment should be consulted to help reconfigure or retune the system for another fuel.

It is best to try to locate several potential suppliers. By doing so, the district will have the security of knowing there will be back-up in case of an interruption from their primary supplier. This will also generate some competition. Contact the New York State Forest Utilization Program for a list of local suppliers.

The bottom line is that both the facility managers and fuel suppliers need to clearly understand the characteristics of fuel needed for their particular system. Consistent particle size and moisture content is particularly important for institutional/commercial customers, and Brasher Falls should insist on the quality of the chip. A sample fuel specification is included in the *Biomass and Green Building Resources* binder to give an idea of the types of characteristics to look for in woodchip fuel. Below is a description of the advantages and disadvantages of different types of biomass fuels in order of preference.

Green Hardwood Chips

A consistent green hardwood chip is the easiest fuel for institutional/commercial scale automated biomass heating systems to handle. Rarely will they jam an auger or conveyor. Green chips burn somewhat cooler than most other biomass fuels making it easier to control the combustion. With proper controls, they burn very cleanly with minimal particulate emissions and little ash. They have less dust than other biomass fuels so they are less messy and safer to handle. Ideally moisture content will be between 35% and 45% on a wet basis. Green hardwood chips can come from sawmill residues or timber harvest operations.

Mill Residues vs. Harvest Residues

Woodchips can be produced at sawmills or other primary wood products industrial sites as part of their waste wood disposal process. Mill residues are typically the most desirable source of fuel woodchips. Mills can produce a bark-free chip with few long pieces or branches that can jam augers and fuel conveyors. A mill supplier can easily calculate trucking costs and can negotiate dependable delivery at a consistent price.

Another potential type of wood fuel is whole tree chips which are produced as part of tree harvesting. Whole tree chips tend to be a dirtier fuel than sawmill residues and may contain small branches, bark, twigs and leaves. The longer pieces can jam the relatively small augers of an institutional/commercial scale biomass system and can add to the daily maintenance because they produce more ash.

The bole of a tree is the de-limbed trunk or stem. Chips made from boles are in-between the quality of a sawmill chip and a whole tree chip. Bole-tree chips tend to have fewer twigs and long stringers than whole tree chips. Both bole-chips and whole-tree chips can be potentially good sources for biomass fuels, although they have a greater likelihood of including oversized chips and they will produce somewhat more ash, compared to mill residues.

Softwood Chips

Green softwood chips will generally have less energy and more water content per truckload, and therefore they will be more expensive to transport than hardwood chips. As long as the combustion and fuel handling equipment is properly calibrated for softwood chips, an automated woodchip heating system can operate satisfactorily with softwood chips. Softwoods tend to have higher moisture contents and can range up to 60% moisture on a wet basis. The best biomass fuel will have less than 50% moisture. One species to avoid altogether is white pine. It has a very high moisture content and therefore relatively low bulk density. The experience in Vermont schools with white pine is that it is a poor biomass fuel for institutional/commercial -scale woodchip systems.

Dry Chips vs. Green Chips

Dry chips (less than 20% moisture on a wet basis) burn considerably hotter than green chips and typically have more dust. The increased operating temperature can deteriorate furnace refractory faster increasing maintenance costs slightly. The dust can make for a somewhat dirtier boiler room which will be a problem for some maintenance staff. Dry chips are also easier to accidentally ignite in the fuel storage bin or fuel handling system. If dry chips are used, the combustion equipment needs to be carefully calibrated to handle these higher temperatures. Dry chips are not generally recommended for institutional/commercial settings.

Bark

Bark has a high energy value, but it also comes with significant maintenance costs. It produces a considerable amount of ash that needs disposal; it can create more smoke than green chips; and it can cause other routine maintenance problems such as frequent jamming of augers from rocks. Bark can be an inexpensive fuel, but the additional maintenance costs make it unattractive for institutional/commercial biomass systems.

Sawdust and Shavings

Sawdust and shavings should ordinarily be ruled out for the institutional/commercial wood heating market. Dry sawdust can be dusty to handle and raises fire safety and explosion issues. Shavings are also dusty and easily ignited and are difficult to handle with typical fuel handling equipment. This fuel type can work fine in an industrial setting, but institutions typically do not have the maintenance staff that can provide the supervision that these fuels need.

BIOMASS FUEL SUPPLIERS

Active providers of woodchip fuel change regularly. For the most up-to-date information on potential providers contact the New York State Forest Utilization Program:

Sloane Crawford
Program Leader
NYS Forest Utilization Program
625 Broadway
Albany, NY 12233-4253
Phone: (518) 402-9415
Fax: (518) 402-9028
sn Crawford@gw.dec.state.ny.us