

Billerica power plant is on hold

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BILLERICA -- The \$200 million 348-megawatt natural gas-fired power plant proposed for North Billerica will likely not be online until 2013, due to a decrease in demand for electricity, DG Clean Power CEO Joseph Fitzpatrick confirmed yesterday.

Fitzpatrick said his group was unsuccessful at ISO New England's November auction to provide electricity for 2012. ISO New England is the independent non-profit corporation that operates the region's power grid.

According to ISO New England, power consumption decreased by nearly 2 percent last year. Power consumption is anticipated to decrease further as a result of the economic downturn and a boost in conservation efforts.

"Anytime we have a slowdown, the overall use goes down," Fitzpatrick said. "Two years ago, overall consumption was down 1 percent but peak demand was increasing, so no one knows the effect this will have on the peak market."

He added that the need for peak plants was further reduced by the ISO entering into demand response contracts with several businesses during their last two auctions. Under the demand response program, the grid pays businesses to turn their lights off during peak hours to conserve energy.

"That alone reduces the need for these plants by a year or two," Fitzpatrick said. "However, it is still a new program and it is unclear how much effect it will have in the long term."