

TESTIMONY TO BE PRESENTED TO THE VERMONT STATE SENATE NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENERGY COMMITTEE--THURSDAY, MARCH 13, 2014.

FOR THE TOWN OF RUTLAND: DONALD J. CHIOFFI, CLERK OF THE RUTLAND TOWN SELECTBOARD

Sen. Hartwell, and honorable members of the committee,

My name is Don Chioffi and I am the Clerk of the Rutland Town Select Board. I have fond memories of serving here as Rutland Town's Representative from 83 to 87, and it is an honor and a privilege to be with you here this morning. Rutland Town is a proud agrarian and rural community of 4000 citizens, and even though we have millions of dollars of industrial and commercial investment in our community, we always have been, and wish to remain, a basically rural community. Most of the operating farms in the near region, and thousands of acres of present and past farm lands, are located in our town, which has a land mass of 19.3 square miles, almost three times the size of Rutland City. Most of our residential development has taken place adjacent to and surrounding these farm lands, most of which, by any designation, certainly consist mostly of prime agricultural soils.

Like most of the rest of the state, we have been pretty much overwhelmed by the rapid expansion of the solar industry within our state and as the duly elected officials of our community, we have been attempting to get ahead of a steeply rising curve. As you may know, the recent initiative of Green Mountain Power to create a "Solar Capital" image, and its designation of Rutland as a "Solar Capital" has gained wide marketing distribution locally, statewide, and even nationally. Recently, GMP even increased its ambitious Solar goal of 6.3 mW, to an even greater goal of 10 mW for this "Solar City" initiative. This is all well and good, except for the fact that most of the present, and much of the proposed siting of these large scale Solar facilities are NOT in Rutland City. They are most assuredly in our town, Rutland Town, which is a totally separate municipality, under separate governance and with its own standards of development and land use patterns. The Cold River Road project now in the PSB process is 2.3 mW, and under separate contract though not yet entered with the PSB, the Thomas property on Post Road adjacent to the National Guard Reserve Center is a 6 mW project. These two projects alone pretty much represent the achievement of GMP's expanded Solar goal, yet with all the talk in the media about GMP and their close relationship and meetings and goals and plans for and with Rutland City, GMP has never once sat down with the leadership of Rutland Town to discuss its plans within our town or made even one reference to Rutland Town in any of its widely publicized marketing of the "Solar City Initiative".

With all of this coming down on us literally in the last six months, we, as a governing board, have been overwhelmed with citizen concern and have felt a great pressure from our community to try and put this in a proper perspective and we are under severe time constraints to act deliberatively to develop some community standards for siting such facilities. In this regard, what you have before you presently is the draft of a document that we have been working on as a town for some time now. Initially, we asked the town of Waitsfield if we could use their document as a baseline, and they graciously agreed and we modified that document to meet our specific town needs. When our

Selectboard made its changes to the document, we voted unanimously to adopt it as an administrative tool and then to proceed to follow the statutory provisions to include it in the Town Plan as an amendment. Since that time it has undergone a hearing at the Planning Commission level, revisions, and forwarding back to the Selectboard. We have also held one hearing which was well attended by parties with varying views, both pro and con, on the Siting Standards. We are presently in "working session" mode and when we finish, we will either send it back to the Planning Commission or hold a second hearing ourselves. We are under no illusion whatsoever that we can sit back and take some long range, comprehensive view of these projects. Things are moving far too rapidly and our citizens are demanding action now to preserve the integrity of our community.

I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have about the process or the Siting Document, but let me be very clear about our motives and our process. We, as elected representatives of our community, and having heard from many, many of them in the performance of our duties, do not feel that they are in any way anti solar in their attitudes. Quite the contrary. They have said on many occasions that they support solar as long as it is sited in locations that are compatible with the neighborhood qualities that caused them to seek out Rutland town as the community in which they made the greatest investment of time and dollars in their lives----their homes. Most of them moved to Rutland Town precisely because of its bucolic, scenic, and pastoral viewshed quality. They do not want this quality destroyed by unregulated industrial strength solar, nor do they wish to see prime agricultural soils taken out of the potential for productive agricultural use for a 20 year plus period.

To that end, we, along with our Planning Commission, are attempting to develop the SOLAR FACILITY SITING STANDARDS that you have before you, and, in doing so, we are trying to adhere to the very principles that we all cherish so dearly in our state of responsibly planning for our community's present and future land use. In doing so, we are following the precepts that a truly wise government of Vermont developed when it embraced the principles of Act 250, and the deference that law gave to the local and regional planning process which has served our state and towns so well for decades.

We are proud, not only to have Senator Kevin Mullin as a long time contributing member of our local government and member of our Board of Civil Authority, but as a County Senator who has not only embraced, but also improved on the ability of local governing bodies to control and protect the values they cherish in their communities. We wholeheartedly support S. 191 and we urge you to give it your full positive recommendation and support its advancement in the other body and final passage into law. Thank you for giving Rutland Town the opportunity to present this testimony.