

Testimony to the House Commerce Committee
Hearing re: Telecom and H.117, Feb. 18, 2015
Marge Garfield, Calais

Thank you for inviting me to testify before your committee. I come before you as a citizen who's had a crash course in telecom as the result of a proposed tower in our town. In the process, I have formed opinions, and have heard and read the opinions of others in the same situation.

My previous involvement with the legislature was in the 1990s, as Governor's Appointee and Co-Chair of the Vermont Adoption Reform Task Force, which produced the Adoption Reform Act of 1996. In my previous life, I was a corporate executive in a large publicly-traded company, where my duties included strategic planning and market forecasting.

Due to time constraints, I will limit my remarks to 5 points, some directly related to H.117. Let me first say that I think placing the VTA under the DPS is a sound idea.

1. The 10-Year Plan. As I read the text of H.117, the first thing that popped out at me was the 10-year plan. It seemed, in a word, ludicrous! Planning is a wonderful and crucial thing. Long-range planning is often very necessary. In a tech industry like telecom, where things change by the minute, a 10-year plan is totally inappropriate. I think a 3-year plan, revised annually, would better serve the Department's goals.
2. In the same vein, nix on the Advisory Board! The Department of Telecom and Connectivity [DTC] should be nimble and responsive to developing trends, not bogged down in ponderous bureaucracy! If the proposed Board assumed the entire function of information-gathering for the Dept.,

- it might work. The board would hold all public hearings, collect input from all the required government and other entities, and stay on top of all marketing trends. This out-sourcing would keep the Dept. streamlined and focused on its primary duties. Five members on such a board would be adequate to accomplish this objective. A better use of resources, however, would put this information-gathering 'market-analysis' function into the Dept. itself, in the form of one full-time employee.
3. Sec. 248a proceedings and towers. Citizens across the state are frustrated in their attempts to question or limit the seemingly arbitrary, random deployment of telecom towers in their midst. The focus of their frustration is the Sec. 248a exemption, which thwarts local control. At the same time, we all understand the importance of deploying a necessary, useful broadband network in the state. There must be something better than an arduous process that appears to be democratic, but isn't. If the state limited large telecom towers to public [state or town] land, there would be no fuss. There would be no need to deal with and dismiss private local concerns in order to issue CPGs. It would be a simple process. The towns would benefit from rental revenues, as well as from shared infrastructure for smart-grid, emergency services, and expanded broadband. Towers would be centralized and easily regulated in terms of build-out. People would know what to expect, there'd be no nasty surprises. There would be consistency, uniformity, and predictability, where none currently exists. It would be much easier for the state to manage.
 4. One infrastructure network in the state. With the seemingly helter-skelter nature of current tower build-out, one would ask, who's benefiting from it? Towers are routinely approved, one by one. Telecom companies want their towers, from which they reap not only monthly service revenues, but also rich rental revenues. Each tower they can build represents a fountain

- of potential wealth. Any and every tower application gets its CPG. For the Vermont public, however, a tower often represents just another unnecessary scar on their beautiful landscape. All a person wants is service – not from several providers, but from ONE RELIABLE provider. The state’s sole interest therefore should be to create ONE integrated infrastructure network that brings the latest technology to all its people. This network is envisioned as a seamless meshing of fiber, broadband, etc, from multiple providers, into ONE SYSTEM. Duplication or redundancy of large telecom towers is just as ludicrous as having competing companies building parallel electrical lines or parallel sets of railroad tracks! Collocation MUST be mandatory before any new tower is approved. It is daunting to know that NO CPG has ever been denied for tower construction. It makes one wonder, ‘Who’s minding the store?’.
5. Language in H.117. The use of “MAY” and “VOLUNTARY” in Sec. 202e (c)(1), makes the collection of important information from telecom companies regarding their privately-funded projects - strictly optional. This would seriously impair the Dept’s. ability to oversee a unified statewide network.

(c)(1) The Director may request from telecommunications service providers voluntary disclosure of information regarding deployment of broadband, telecommunications facilities, or advanced metering infrastructure that is not publicly funded.

In summary, I believe the state would be best served in its telecom objectives to have a streamlined, nimble, and responsive Department of Telecomm and Connectivity [change that name!] that could keep pace with the ever-changing conditions of the industry it serves.

Thank you for your time and attention to my concerns which, I can assure you, include the thoughts and ideas of many other people, and from many, many hours of research.