

OUR SOLAR JOURNEY

Our journey with the solar process started in July of 2013 when 2 representatives of GroSolar showed up at our house to state that they bought the parcel of land across the street and were going to install a solar farm. I had no idea what an education we were in for. Within a couple of weeks, myself along with almost all of our neighbors met at the site with GroSolar's, Steve Remen who explained their plans. Not one attending party was in favor of these plans but that fell on deaf ears. We asked point blank if they would consider another site since there was no support at all among the neighbors, but the response was it didn't matter and they were going to continue with these plans. He also stated that they already had bought the land and also explained how the panels would be screened and that they would be set back 100 feet from the road to soften the view from our properties. Both of these statements were not true as they didn't close on the land till the fall of 2014 (ironically about a week after our public service board hearing and before a decision was rendered) and the panels were now going to be set 64 feet from the road and not the 100 as promised.

Next came our involvement with our town officials who listened to our concerns and started a process of adopting solar siting recommendations. After countless meetings with the town's planning commission and select board, by October of that year we had siting standards in place to hopefully deal with the onslaught of solar which would be introduced in our town. All of these countless meetings were met with great opposition from the solar industry and Green Mountain Power. Steve Costello of Green Mountain Power was a permanent fixture at every meeting held regarding this issue. GroSolar also rallied the troops and countless solar company representatives attended meetings to lend their support. In these endless hearings I remember making the statement that the only thing Green in these solar farms was the money. If you could see the actual final numbers it is almost criminal the return these companies are getting on their investment. That is why solar companies from every corner of this country are here because according to them our state has made it easier than anywhere else in this country to install these farms. I also remember making the statement that we as rate payers will be paying the freight as these solar farms are receiving 3 to 5 times what we are currently purchasing our power for. I loved Steve Costello's, from GMP, response that you can't look at it that way since those numbers get blended into our current purchase numbers so they are not true numbers. All I know if you keep blending higher numbers with lower ones, they only go one way – UP!

Then came the decision to be part of the process with the public service board. The only real education I got here is that the word public should not be involved with this process at all. Let's see lawyers, engineers, site designers, landscape experts, professors, web people, marketing experts, etc. etc. and the list goes on and on and the only common denominator is money, and

lots of it. The average Vermonter does not have a prayer in hell of partaking in this process unless they have a lot of financial backing.

Fast forward to the summer of 2014 and getting ready for our PSB hearing, countless more hearings, site visits and on and on. Another educational factor in my naivety that you actually go before the Public Service Board. Which is not the case as you actually go before a sub-board of the PSB.

Things are moving along and our hearing officer seems actually engaged and is listening to our concerns. It seems we have a sympathetic ear with him and then wham 1 week before the start of our PSB hearing date he resigns and we are appointed a new hearing officer. The new hearing officer does come down to partake in a site visit before the hearing but it is quite obvious he really doesn't want to be there.

Then our hearing starts, more time lost from work, travel to Montpelier only to be frustrated by a group (the sub-board) who could care less about being there. One word comes to mind, "travesty" all this time, energy, only to be treated like second class citizens. A room full of lawyers, 3 for the solar company, 1 for us, 1 for the town and countless others. Ironically GMP has a lawyer present but again according to Steve Costello of GMP they have no financial interest in the process.

Then comes the PSB decision, 100% in favor of construction. Not 1 of ours, or the town's experts got any favorable comments from the board.

What's next? Appeal or request a hearing before the actual PSB not the sub-board. A little refreshing, in this hearing the PSB seems engaged and interested, asking questions and seem to be actually concerned in what is before them unlike the sub-board. We ask for and receive a site visit date. According to our information, the first solar site in the state, the actual board is going to visit before issuing a decision. The day of the site visit starts out with Greg Cox of Vermont's Farmers Food Network explaining the mitigation we neighbors put forth to trade this site with another one so this site could be kept in the agricultural use as it is on prime agricultural land. We walk to all of the neighboring properties and I have the ear of one of the board members, they ask why didn't GroSolar take you up on your offer on the mitigation land swap. I explain they don't need to as this board has given them a home run before getting to the plate. They look at me puzzled as if what do mean? and I state you have not denied one single project yet so why should they do anything because the PSB is 100% in their court. Or should I call the PSB the GMP board.

In closing, the only concession the PSB made was that about 15 trees that GroSolar wanted to take down must remain, so to date between the town and our group those trees cost about \$10,000.00 a piece. Words of advice for those of you thinking of taking on this process, either purchase the land before the solar company does, or sell your property for a huge discount after the panels are installed and move.

David Fucci

Vermonters for Responsible Solar