

Email received 3/23/15 as Public Comment for the 3/24/15 Public Hearing on Renewable Energy Siting

March 23, 2015 Submitted by Lesley Becker, Burlington, Vermont

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute comments on Vermont's renewable energy siting process.

The siting of solar development around the state, especially along Route 7 in the southern part of the state, is having an adverse effect on aesthetics. When I see them as I drive along Route 7, I wonder why every county wouldn't have to cover all available roof tops with solar panels before Vermont sacrifices the once-lovely views and productive farmland along the road, enjoyed by residents and cash-carrying tourists alike.

Why isn't the PSB required to use the "Quechee Analysis" developed by the Environmental Board? If the PSB can discount anyone living near a proposed solar site as not being an "average" person for the purposes of the analysis, then the analysis is rigged, and the current PSB approval process is not working. It's not okay to break all the rules in order to achieve an energy goal that even the Public Service Department has admitted will have "only marginal direct impact on the climate". Actually, here's the point the PSD was making- "Vermont is a small state. Vermonters could eliminate our greenhouse gas emissions, or double them with only marginal direct impact on the climate." (Vermont DPS TES Draft December 2013. Section 4.3: Recognizing the role of the State vrs. private sector and other governments.)

I am an ardent supporter of renewable energy. I realize that my suggestion that the Legislature take time to consider the consequences of both renewable energy siting and the legislative sanctioning of shifting decision-making authority away from local planning boards and municipalities will raise accusations that such thoughtful considerations are only an attempt to build barriers to a timely shift to clean energy. These accusations may even come from supporters of renewable energy and organizations that Vermonters look to as protectors of the environment. Please do not be swayed by those voices – and allow time to consider the impacts and the alternatives.

I ask the Legislature to look carefully at industrial renewable energy projects that are

being touted as “clean energy”, especially in the wake of the Kingdom Community Wind project in Lowell. It is uncontrovertibly true that a shift away from fossil fuels must happen as soon as possible. But don’t throw out the baby with the bath water. Important ecological considerations (wetlands and hydrology being only two factors) are under the radar or just plain discounted in the rush to bring profitable energy projects to scenic Vermont.

While the Legislature works to balance the energy and economic needs of the state with the needs of small communities to retain their identity – consider how Vermont’s small communities could be impacted by disempowerment of their local democratic processes by an energy siting process that trumps town plans.

The energy siting process needs improvement, but it will be difficult to do, unless the Legislature revisits the strategies and timeline of the State’s Energy Goals, rethinking the importance of electrical generation and making the less-profitable strategy of investing in conservation the top priority.