

Addison County Regional Planning Commission

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Testimony of Adam Lougee on behalf of the Addison County Regional Planning Commission

Broadly, the bill recognizes the land use impacts poorly sited renewable energy generation projects can have on Vermont's scenic landscape. It also recognizes the legitimate interest citizens, municipalities and regions have in influencing where renewable energy generating facilities are sited to reduce impacts and promote thoughtful land use policies. These broad principles are important and we strongly support all portions of the bill which recognize them. We also recognize the State's interest in promoting renewable energy generation and the rights of landowners to use their property and believe the bill strikes an appropriate balance between these respective interests.

Within supporting that broad framework, this bill has gotten very, unnecessarily complicated. Mechanisms for the creation of regional plans and how elements, like the Energy Section of the regional plan, are used already exist. We see no reason for another "certification process". Furthermore, are concerned about the precedent set by giving an agency, any agency, the ability to certify regional plans, and by extension, town plans. Currently, regional plans are developed by each region, in conformance with broad state planning principles. They are and should remain documents created by local organizations to serve the people of the region. Agency certification has the potential to work against the local and regional character of the plans that will make them functional and powerful.

Similarly, the approval process for town energy policies should remain exactly the same as it currently stands for every other element of a Town plan. Regional Planning Commissions are logical extensions of their member municipalities. The current review process works well. I do not believe we should make an exception and change the structure for this particular element. It unnecessarily complicates the entire planning process.

I would add that within the Act 250 process Criterion 10 already requires conformance with local and regional plans without any additional "certification". This standard proposed of "deference" is already weaker than that to accommodate significant interests of the state. It should not require additional state "certification". The complicated and legalistic appeals process proposed also serves as another reason to avoid the "certification" process. We should trust in our current process, which generally functions well and act to create thoughtful energy plans rather than promote a place for jurisdictional squabbling. Lastly, as the legislative Branch, I am quite certain that you understand the power of the purse. DPS has been and will continue to contract with the RPC's to create plan elements meeting broad statutory needs that recognize the need for and legitimacy of local renewable generation of power. The contract will give DPS significant

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authority to control the principles the work must strive to meet, but the flexibility to allow different regions, or towns to employ different strategies to meet those goals.

Accordingly, ACRPC would recommend eliminating the certification process, but otherwise wholeheartedly supports the bill.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Lougee', with a large, stylized flourish extending to the right.

Adam G. Lougee
Executive Director
Addison County Regional Planning Commission