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Vermont House and Senate Natural Resources and Energy Committee Members -

I was unable to attend the March 24 hearing on the siting of solar energy projects because the Sudbury Planning Commission, of which I am chair, was hosting a community forum regarding the update of our town plan. Here are my comments that I would have shared at the hearing.

Firstly, I am an advocate for solar energy - my wife and I have two solar panels on our roof for domestic hot water. Also, based on comments of townspeople at a PSB hearing held in Sudbury this past summer a majority of people in Sudbury are similarly inclined. Unfortunately, the term solar now comes with negative connotations due in large part to the "in your face" development along and close to major thoroughfares in Vermont. In the State's arbitrary rush to promote renewable energy generation - solar in particular - the siting of these projects through Act 248 is fast-tracked in a manner that leaves host towns with no leverage in where or how solar development takes place. The Sudbury planning commission became aware of the "rules of the game" long after the applications were in process and when representatives of two different projects paid the board courtesy calls. The citizens of Sudbury declared the PSB hearing a "sham" when they learned their comments about the proposed site had no bearing on the matter.

In preparing for the community forum I reread our current town plan and was struck by language in a section entitled "Planning in Vermont" that discusses how Act 250 insures that developments comply with policies as set forth in regional and local plans. Act 250 integrates planning and development on state, regional and local levels and creates a consistent approach to issues surrounding rapid growth. Wow, that is so reassuring and collaborative. But now we have Act 248 that minimizes and virtually excludes local land use plans from the process and allows for solar developments on lands in communities where it most cost advantageous for the owners/developers. So now we have one law that ensures a deliberative and inclusive process to development and another law that allows for rapid growth with less oversight and exemptions from any local control. In the case of Sudbury, the State's rush to solar has resulted in the conversion of agricultural lands bordering Route 30 into solar fields. These huge arrays constitute the largest developments in town, change the character of the landscape and impose themselves on neighbors view sheds. The impact of this type of rapid, large-scale and new development on a small rural town cannot be overstated but ironically the town through its town plan for orderly development has no standing in the matter. Shameful.

Changes to Act 248 should be made that recognize the legitimacy and authority of local plans in the siting of solar developments.

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