

Testimony from SunCommon, James Moore, April 17, 2015 to HNRE Committee re: committee renewable energy siting bill

Good afternoon.

My name is James Moore, I am one of the Co-Founders at SunCommon. SunCommon was started three years ago from the belief that everyone deserves a healthy environment and safe world, and that clean energy is where that starts. When we started there were 4 of us working in a file closet. Today we have 70 staff and an estimated 40 installers. Our staff are spread over most of the state from Danville to Manchester and Hartland to St. Albans.

When we started SunCommon we were focused on residential solar only. Every month we would talk to hundreds of Vermonters who expressed interest in going solar, the only problem is that we said no more than we said yes. Between roofs that face the wrong direction, are not fit for solar or are shaded by trees most Vermonters could not contribute, as they wanted to, to creating a strong clean energy economy.

This reality lead us to expand our offering to include community solar arrays, where folks can virtually connect, through their utility bill, with a community array to get solar credits on their bill.

It took a year and a half to arrange financing to make this model work. Then we needed to work to find hosts for the community arrays. To that end we have spoke with more than 300 possible hosts, visited just over half of those, signed up around 30 and we think around 20 of those might be buildable in the end. So we reject more than 90% of sites. We are committed to finding good ones and it is very hard work.

Our process includes outreach to abutters, town energy and planning/zoning commissions and or select boards in the design phase. We do this for two reasons:

1. It is the right thing to do to engage the community.
2. It is the smart thing to do if we want a CPG from the PSB.

We have regularly adjusted designs and or included screening based on the input received. We have also just pulled the plug on some projects due to the feedback.

We believe that the process we have in place now for permitting solar is working well. It forces developers to look hard for the best buildable sites. It precipitates outreach to neighbors and towns, and developers who ignore the feedback do so at their own risk of not getting a permit. Mostly I think it ensures that only the most viable even get to the permit stage, which is what we want. We don't want the PSB clogged up with projects that will likely get canceled or not get a permit.

While we believe the process is working well that doesn't mean it can't be improved. I have had a brief chance to look through the recent committee bill related to solar

siting and think there is much to commend in it. There are some sections that we believe would benefit from some tweaks and or further clarifying.

1. Great to have towns committees have party status. We strive to treat them as if they do now. However, this section is drafted very broadly and would give a town party status related to areas fully outside of its expertise. I think there are legal experts who can and will offer helpful language on this section.
2. Regarding aesthetics, further clarification would be helpful to ensure that the drafted language is not interpreted to have a neighbor perspective or opinion trump an overall aesthetic analysis, but rather just ensure it is included.
3. Regarding the neighborhood solar facility, retail customers from adjoining towns makes more sense than a 5 mile radius from a practical community outreach perspective.
4. We have questions related to the implications of Sec 8, for small systems. So we might like the opportunity to offer additional comments in the future on that section.
5. The last issue that I wanted to ask you to consider related to sizing has to do with using the limited good roofs we have. State law right now leads to less than optimal use of our limited good roof space.

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you all today. We would be more than happy to give you all a tour of our sites if you would like and or answer any questions you might have.