

# **The Need for Leadership in Solar Energy Development in Vermont**

The lack of state leadership and legislation dealing with solar siting issues has created a situation that pits people who have very strong views about climate change against other citizens who see solar energy implementation as taking away their property rights or destroying the essence of Vermont. It may set a younger generation of renters against an older generation of property owners and has created social discord. For most people who own a home, it is their largest single investment, and by negating the most important protection homeowners had for maintaining the value of their property (zoning laws), the implementation of solar energy development has created angst and chaos.

The negative publicity generated by poorly sited solar projects is poisoning the well of public opinion. The lack of siting guidelines has not increased the amount of installed solar energy generation, rather it has created vehement push-back that is resulting in retarding the growth of solar energy in the state.

The actions of the PSB seem contrary to the interests of local municipalities and their citizens; and in this case, the divide is between localities and Montpelier. Many of the PSB's findings appear ridiculous and maddening to the common citizen.

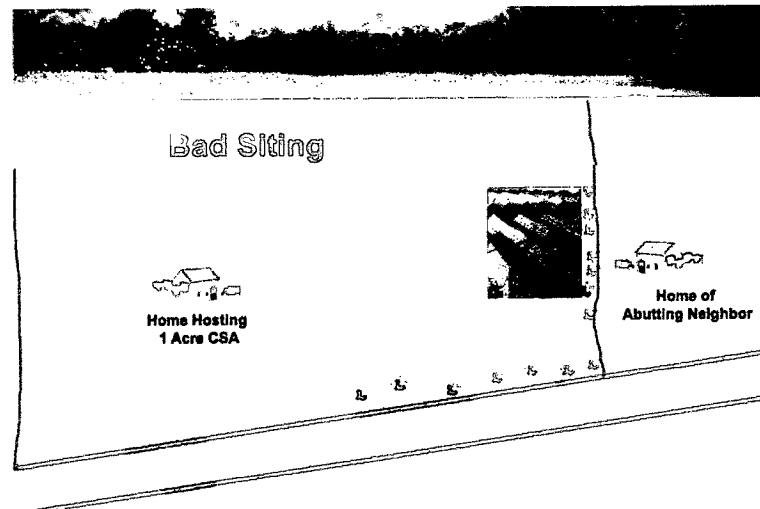
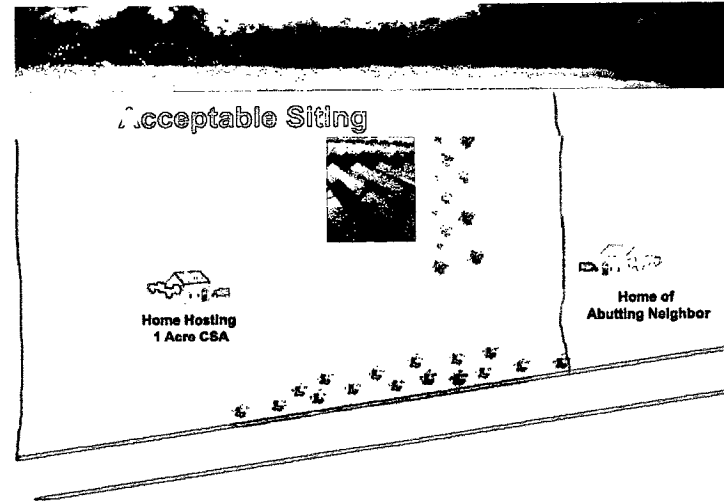
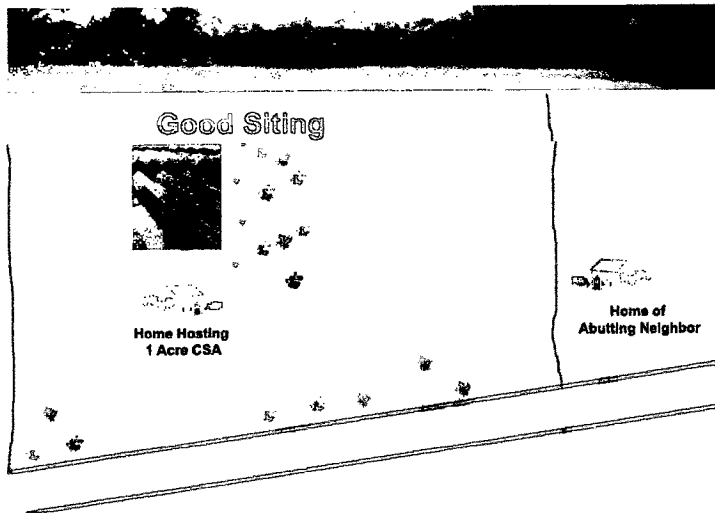
Because of the differences in the towns and cities across the state, a one-size-fits-all solution will be nearly impossible to find. This does not abdicate you from creating some sensible siting guidelines that will go a long way towards increasing the development of solar energy in Vermont and decreasing the current level of negativity.

# Thoughts Regarding Increasing Solar Energy Generation in Vermont

- **Have the PSB become more sensitive to municipal governments and their citizens**
  - The actions of the PSB are seen as an authoritative and uncaring overreach by State government
  - The PSB should cease the use of its ludicrous definition of an “average person” when applying the Quechee test
- **Strongly encourage municipalities to develop town plans that accommodate solar projects**
- **Have the PSB show deference to town plans that accommodate solar projects while having intelligent siting and screening requirements**
  - Have the PSB honor set-backs as defined in town zoning laws.
    - *Suggestion: set the date of the zoning laws to 12/31/2013, which will eliminate the gaming of the system*
  - Adopt a real good neighbor siting policy (see page three). This will have tremendous impact on reducing bad press and ill will towards the solar industry
  - Have the PSB support municipal screening criteria
    - Adequate screening of a project from its abutters is critically important
      - *Screening should be put in place prior to the construction of a project and achieve its screening objectives from day one*
- **Require abandonment and decommissioning sureties on all projects over 100 kW**
  - The limit of 1.0 MW does not protect towns or neighbors against bankruptcy of a developer or a land lessor lacking the financial strength to pay for the decommissioning and removal of an array
- **Suggest that developers work with local planning commissions**
  - Too often there exists an adversary position between localities and developers. This needs to stop.
    - *Suggestion: Towns should give developers process guidelines for efficiently managing projects (see page 4).*
- **The solar industry has demonstrated that it cannot police itself**
  - To move forward some minimal regulations are desperately needed

## A Real Good Neighbor Policy

All free-standing solar projects must be sited and designed so that they will create no greater burden, including adverse visual impacts, on surrounding property owners or public infrastructure than it does on the property on which it is sited. For example, a resident must not site one or more free-standing solar panels in a location selected to minimize the visibility of the panel(s) from his/her residence, while placing the panel(s) where the array will be more visible from a neighboring residence or a public vantage point.



# Renewable Energy Project Application Procedures

In the interest of efficient project development, the following procedures should be followed prior to developers making applications to the PSB.

- Developers should meet with a town Planning Commission
- Developers should show a Planning Commission overhead plot diagrams (shown to scale) indicating the placement of the proposed solar array relative to surrounding land and structures
- Developers should show a Planning Commission photographic renderings showing the view of the proposed development from nearby houses and roads, as well as distant views from which the proposed development can be seen
- Developers should show the plans for the project to all neighbors whose properties are contiguous with the solar installation
- Developers should provide a Planning Commission with written comments from all neighbors who may have an unobstructed view of the solar installation