

To: Senate and House Natural Resources and Energy Committees
Joint Public Hearing on Renewable Energy Siting
From: Colleen Halley, Moretown resident
Date: 3/24/2015
Re: Testimony in support of building local renewable energy generation projects and in opposition to any new delays or complications in the siting or permitting process

Dear Committee Members,

I'm here today because I've gone solar and want to make sure more of my friends and neighbors can do the same. I want legislators here to be looking for ways to make it easier and affordable for Vermonters to go solar, not be putting up roadblocks to building more local, renewable power in our state.

I've lived in the Mad River Valley for nearly 20 years. Eight years ago when my husband at the time and I were building our house, we invested in solar. As two young thirty-somethings in the Valley, I doubt we would have been able to do that without the state and federal subsidies at the time.

We went on to buy a business in the Valley five years ago. Running a ski shop, we knew that tourists were our livelihood. When solar farms started popping up along the route 100 corridor, by American Flatbread and Yestermorrow, it spurred conversation. I spoke with many customers about the solar they were now seeing in fields and on rooftops around the Valley – and let me tell you, 9 times out of 10 we agreed that these were a good thing.

Skiers get it. If you want to talk about a group of people who understand the threat posed by global warming, it's skiers. Seeing those solar panels – for me, and for many of them – was a positive. My community is doing what it can to address climate change that threatens our winters, my customers' passions, and our valley's economy.

For me, local renewable power projects are part of Vermont's natural working landscape just like farms are. As a side business now, I rent out rooms in my house. I market my room listings as "Solar living near skiing and hiking" and many of my visitors have told me that's part of the reason they choose to stay at my place. It's something they felt good about. They were able to enjoy the scenic beauty and know that they were helping support investments to fight the climate change that threatens it. We shouldn't think that tourists don't want to see renewable energy. What I've heard has suggested the exact opposite.

I am proud to see more local renewable generation being built in my community and all over the state. And the fact is, we still need more and time is of the essence. Maybe it's because I live in Moretown – a town that was underwater in Irene – or because I lost the house I grew up in on the Jersey Shore to Superstorm Sandy. Maybe that's why for me, when I see a solar farm or a wind turbine, I am inspired.

I must admit that I get irate when I hear about people who complain that they don't want to look at solar farms. Really? Our current PSB process and regulations do well to address any actual environmental concerns that might arise from renewable projects. That leaves the "aesthetic considerations".

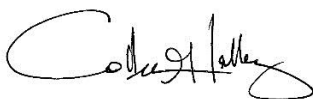
To all those who say they don't like looking at solar panels, I ask you, would you rather look at the footprints and fallout of coal, nukes, oil or fracking operations? Because someone is. Maybe it's not you, but someone's shouldering that burden. Why not you? Why not us? And why not something much easier to embrace. We all use power, and it's only fair that we all bear some of the inconveniences that accompany our need for that power. Looking at solar panels is hardly a lot to ask.

I'd rather look at a community solar farm in my town than the devastation of another Irene. That's my "aesthetic preference". I see solar as a natural fit in Vermont's working landscape, and the many tourists I have hosted have felt the same.

I wouldn't be surprised if those of us in communities harder hit by these climate realities are less likely to forget what's at stake and more willing to host the renewable energy projects. But the fact is, we *all* have a responsibility to do our part. We will all pay the price – some more than others – if we don't.

Climate change for me is personal. But for all of us, it's an urgent reality we need to address. Skiers and snowboarders in the Mad River Valley get that. The tourists that stay at my house in foliage season get that. We don't have time to delay. That's why I urge you to reject any new roadblocks or delays to building out our renewable energy potential.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Colleen F. Halley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "C" and a long, sweeping underline.

Colleen F. Halley
Moretown, Vermont