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To: Katie Pickens
Subject: siting

I appreciate having the opportunity to weigh in on the siting of communications and energy Facilities in Vermont. I live in North Calais where a proposed Wi-Fi tower will be Constructed if Vtel gains the approval of the Vermont Public Service board. From what we have learned in the last eight weeks, the construction of this tower in a pristine neighborhood is almost inevitable.

The dozens of residents that are in opposition to this project oppose it for a diverse number of reasons but there is agreement on one thing: The process for approving and siting communication facilities in rural Vermont is sorely lacking. Although there are provisions that allow public input, that input is universally ignored while structured in such a way that it reinforces the erroneous notion that neighbors and landowners have been “involved”. Just because there is a “hearing” does nothing to guarantee there will be any actual listening.

Thus far, if a project such as this is deemed to be in the public good it gets built and even though there are requirements to demonstrate “substantial deference” to local zoning and/or colocation of such a facility if that is possible. This never happens. Since the utilities have been excused from the “burden” of any local permitting process, this is simply their bottom line. Nothing else matters except constructing the illusion that there is public input. Hearings have become as predictable as being tried by Joseph Stalin.

The PSB has demonstrated a systematic disregard for public input, issuing a certificate of public good for every tower that has been proposed. Does that sound like “substantial deference”? It’s no deference at all. The system is rigged and the process is a sham.

In researching the proposal that pertains to our situation we’ve been dumbfounded time and again by how the deck has been stacked against tax paying, voting citizens of Vermont. Although there is ample evidence of serious health concerns, well documented and peer reviewed, particularly for children, the Federal Telecommunication Act of 1996 makes it illegal to present such data while combatting communication towers.

The tower proposed for Bayne-Commoli road is not only unsightly, turning a pristine, rural neighborhood, deer yard and thriving habitat for a variety of creatures (including human beings) into an industrial zone and soiling the ridge lie, it is also decidedly unnecessary. Everyone out here already has wifi and

we've heard expert testimony that Vtel's operation can easily be colocated on an already existing tower in Woodbury.

Although these initiatives may have originally been about providing broad band service to rural areas, this no longer seems to be the case. Completing a company's network is not the highest priority and apparently they're not interested in being accountable to anyone except their stockholders. They seem perfectly willing to bully their way to a multitude of ugly towers, perhaps dangerous, and frequently unnecessary by building however many they want, wherever they want. Please don't help them. There are real people who are getting hurt in each of these siting fiascos.

Speaking of our particular group, we're not against progress nor are we luddites by any stretch. We're just a group of ordinary Vermonters who have begun experiencing a process of complete disenfranchisement that troubles us to the core. And we'd like to fight against the notion of corporations invading the countryside, despoiling the character of our rural neighborhoods, compromising our quality of life in an effort to use the very air above our heads as rental space to fuel their bottom line. It's truly an awful experience to be dismissed.

Finally, a chilling piece in yesterday's New York Times is pertinent to our situation. A new, provocative study outlines a "corporate takeover of the first amendment", an assertion backed by data. A law professor at Columbia outlined what has happened:

"Once the patron saint of protesters and the disenfranchised, the First Amendment has become the darling of economic libertarians and corporations.....who recognize its power to immunize private enterprise from legal restraint".

This is exactly what we get when we cede our right to be heard to entities, who by the very nature of their agreement with the State of Vermont, have absolutely no reason to take anything that we say into consideration before doing what they planned.

In siting these facilities the PSB bears an enormous responsibility but it is not to corporations. It is to ordinary Vermonters who have settled here or remained here because of the state's exquisite character. It's magical. Anyone who speaks of it at any length seems to have their eyes glaze over. It's mesmerizing. There are extremely few places like it. Certainly not a place for unconscionable, wholesale devastation-for-profit without a shred of real accountability.

Please make something happen.

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