

My testimony here today supports the role of towns and their residents in the energy siting process, and the beauty of Vermont. The Public Service Board and the legislature seem to have concluded that the beauty of Vermont must be sacrificed in the march towards renewables. Whether what we gain is worth what we lose, and whether our sacrifice exceeds our obligation are proper questions.

Towns currently play second fiddle to the PSB in energy projects, but they do have a role that can change depending on the perceived impact of the project on the town. The so-called "host" town to a wind project gets the most attention of any town in PSB hearings, and gets the lion's share of any proceeds. No other town but Lowell was offered a vote on that project.

Meanwhile, because views of 500' tall structures on top of high mountains do not vanish when you cross the town line, the towns in the viewshed of a turbine project get little except a complete change in the character and quality of their surroundings. That they get anything at all is an acknowledgement that the turbines are not an improvement.

There are those who believe that a single town should not be able to block a needed large-scale utility project. We're more concerned that a single town is able to advance such a project solely on the basis of their town vote alone, to the detriment of adjacent towns.

Unfortunately, this is what could have happened in Island Pond, when a 25 turbine project was proposed for the Seneca mountain range, mostly in the town of Ferdinand, in the UTG. Looking across 600-acre Island Pond Lake at the Senecas is a postcard view from Island Pond village, which relies heavily on tourism. The project was heavily opposed in Brighton, but a positive opinion poll in the UTG could have resulted in 500' industrial energy plants dominating the view. So if I'm looking for a lakefront lot with a mountain view, I'm going elsewhere first.

Ultimately all three towns polled against the project, and then it was all made moot when the applicant withdrew the application.

But, how does the PSB look at the view? 248 says the PSB must have a finding of no undue adverse impact on, among other things, aesthetics. The Lowell project could not pass the standard test for aesthetics, the Quechee test, so the board had to find another way to advance the project they had already judged a benefit to society, prior to judging it good for the public—a distinction that escapes me to this day. So they simply decided to change the Quechee test so the project would pass. The project was a benefit to society and so the adverse aesthetic impact was not undue. It's fair to conclude that this so-called quasi-judicial board was under some strong outside pressure to adopt a bias toward renewable energy in general that they wrongly and broadly applied to individual projects to advance projects, rather than using the process to judge projects on their individual merits. But of course if the PSB used the Quechee test, there would be no 500' tall wind turbines on the ridgelines of Vermont, which is as it should be.

Vermonters can do their share of combating climate change without sacrificing the mountaintops and ridgelines that have been celebrated in stories, paintings travel and promotional literature for probably as long as we've been a state.

Thank you.