

The Need for Local Input in the Siting of Solar Energy Installations

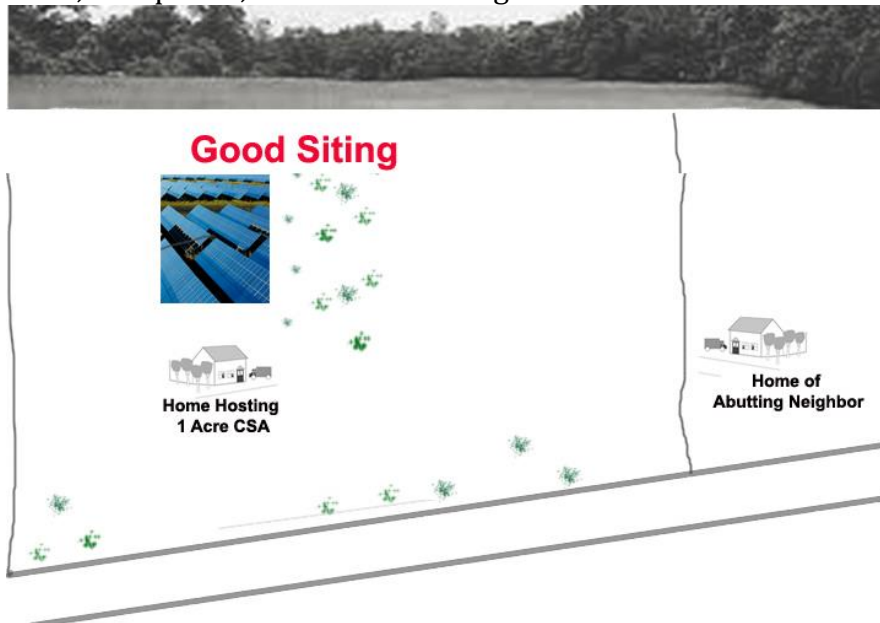
Common Sense Suggestions

This past weekend I received a call from an unhappy solar developer who was very concerned about the negative publicity generated by an ill-conceived 150 kW project in New Haven. He was incredulous at the stupidity [his words] of the developer who paid no attention to the most basic community sensitivities. His comment to me was, “The industry has proven it cannot regulate itself, and some regulations need to be put in place, so that guys like me can move projects forward without running into opposition created by other guys’ lousy siting jobs.” Without some basic guidelines for siting and screening solar installations, the push-back from individuals and their communities will make it increasingly difficult to hit the state’s targets for renewable energy.

Because of the vast differences in topography, and the unique character of towns and cities, the solution lies in having the Public Service Board take into serious account local zoning regulations and town plans. That said, it is important that town plans offer ways to accommodate renewable energy projects and not be a litany of hoops and hurdles serving only to block renewable energy development.

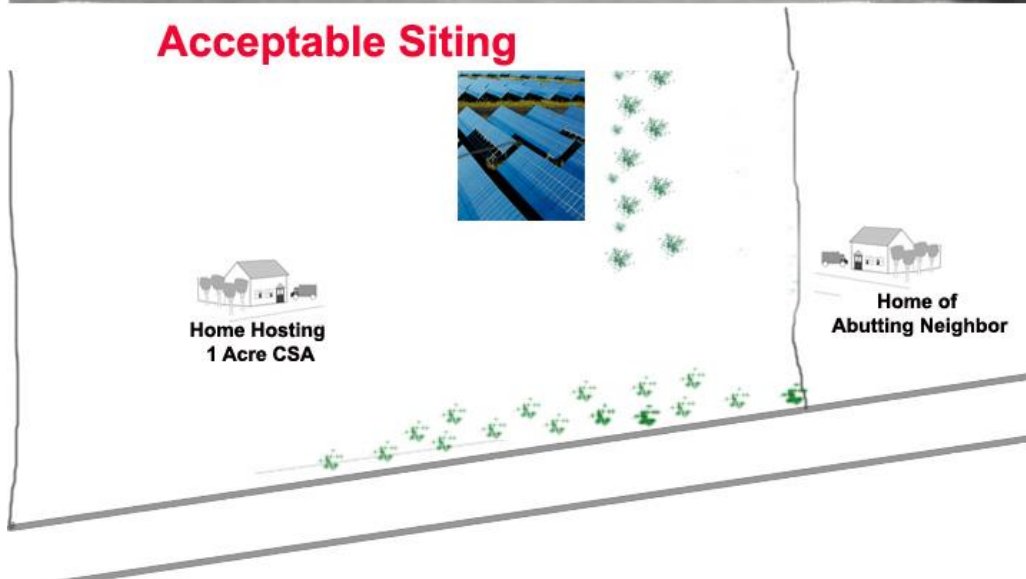
Here are a few suggestions for regulations that may work for many towns and should be respected by the PSB.....

Adopt a Good Neighbor Policy - A free-standing solar array should be sited so that the array creates no greater burden on the neighboring property owners or public infrastructure than it does on the property on which it is sited. Below are examples of Good, Acceptable, and Bad CSA siting:





Acceptable Siting



Bad Siting



Adopt effective screening requirements that protect neighboring properties from unfettered views of a renewable energy installation.

Require decommissioning funds for all projects greater than 100 kW.

Protect scenic corridors and important view sheds.

Allow the creation Solar Parks by changing the wording in Section 248, Title 30

The definition of a Solar Park is a site that would co-locate a number of separately owned 150 kW to 500 kW solar installations sharing a common infrastructure. It will be more cost efficient for developers to site CSA's in a solar park, it will provide CSA sites for towns who find it extremely difficult to site them locally, and because my vision of a solar park includes the involvement of town government, the likelihood of the negativities associated with poor siting will be severely diminished.

For solar parks to become a reality, changes are needed in Section 248, Title 30 that states, "A group of structures or pieces of equipment shall be considered one facility if it uses the same fuel source and infrastructure and is located in close proximity," and that a " 'Net metering system' means a facility for generation of electricity that is of no more than 500 kW." The removal of this restricting language is easy for you to do, and you should do it now.

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