

Senate Finance

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VPIRG Testimony in Support of H.676

Sarah Wolfe, Clean Energy Advocate

VPIRG supports H.676 as it exists today. The purpose of the bill, from our perspective, is to bring aspects of Vermont's permitting laws in line with the energy policies the legislature has passed over the past several years. These do not constitute changes to net metering or other energy policy, but rather simply bring the law in line with changes that have already been made.

First, 676 would allow parking lot solar arrays to be exempted from the setback provision. Given that many parking lots are intentionally sited close to roads, the setback is in this case an arbitrary roadblock to parking lot canopy projects in fact being built. We do support clarifying language, that we believe has been offered by the Public Utilities Commission, to confirm that the Commission can still opt to require a setback as they feel is necessary.

This does not change the underlying definition of what constitutes a preferred site – meaning that this would not allow the canopy to extend beyond the footprint of the parking lot. In addition, the parking lot itself still has to meet the local ordinances and zoning for the municipality and must be in existence as a parking lot prior to the proposal for solar.

This will not fundamentally change the economics of building parking lot canopy solar. Its primary effect will be to open up some locations that would have otherwise been prohibited simply because of the setback.

In addition, the bill aligns the Agency of Natural Resources permit review fees with the new permit requirements laid out in the net metering rule. Currently ANR collects fees for projects sited on rooftops, which they do not actually need to review, as there is no impact to ANR's jurisdiction. However, they do not currently collect fees for systems between 50 kW and 139 kW. Prior to the latest version of the rule, they did not review those systems, so no fee was needed. In this version of the rule, they do, so this bill would align the fees with the projects they are actually reviewing.

For these reasons, we support this commonsense bill and would urge the Committee to pass it.