



## **Senate Natural Resources and Energy Committee**

### **Energy Facility Siting Testimony**

#### **Vermont League of Cities and Towns**

*Thursday, April 6, 2017*

Thank you for the opportunity to testify about renewable energy planning at the local level under Act 174. With me today is Jared Cadwell, VLCT President and Chair of the Fayston selectboard.

We represent the 246 member cities and towns of the Vermont League of Cities and Towns. Additionally I serve as vice chair of the planning commission in my town and a member of the Central Vermont Regional Commission regional energy committee so I have a bit of perspective on the new energy planning process.

#### **Cities and Towns Are Committed to Using Renewable Energy and Realizing Efficiencies.**

In the last several years, cities and towns have partnered with private sector businesses on installing renewable energy facilities that serve municipal properties; been partners in net metering projects; and installed renewable energy and energy efficiency projects for facilities such as water treatment plants, municipal buildings, wastewater treatment facilities. Their energy committees have co-hosted efficiency and button-up programs throughout the state.

In 2010 the Town of Bennington completed installation of a turbine in its water supply facility that generates 15kW of net-metered electricity. The village electric utilities in Stowe and Hyde Park (two of 14 municipal electric departments) are building 2.7 MW of solar capacity that they will own. Last year Burlington Vermont announced that it had achieved the goal of being powered by 100 percent renewable energy. In 2014 the City of Winooski purchased four all electric cars for their municipal fleet.

#### **How Are We Doing?**

In the 2016 Comprehensive Energy Plan, Vermont's energy goals are to:

reduce total energy consumption per capita by 15 % by 2025 and more than 1/3 by 2050;

meet 25 % of the remaining energy need from renewable sources by 2025, 40% by 2035, and 90 % by 2050;

meet three end-use sector goals for 2025: 10 % renewable energy transportation; 30% renewable energy supplied buildings; and 67% renewable electric power.

*([http://publicservice.vermont.gov/sites/dps/files/documents/Pubs\\_Plans\\_Reports/State\\_Plans/Comp\\_Energy\\_Plan/2015/2016CEP\\_ES\\_Final.pdf](http://publicservice.vermont.gov/sites/dps/files/documents/Pubs_Plans_Reports/State_Plans/Comp_Energy_Plan/2015/2016CEP_ES_Final.pdf))*

We are rapidly moving toward those goals. The Energy Action Network's Community Energy Dashboard gives an indication of the growth in renewable energy sites. Their website map indicates that in June 2016 there were 7,171 renewable electricity sites (of all sizes) in Vermont; in November 2016, there were 7,617, and in February 2017 there were 8,350. Of that number, 6,886 were solar facilities and 171 were wind.

According to the Community Energy Dashboard, renewable electricity capacity in June of 2016 was 1,047,096 kW and in March 2017 was 1,107,236 kW. According to the dashboard, more than 7,000 certificates of public good (CPGs) have been issued for solar PV sites in Vermont and a few more than 160 CPGs have been issued for wind facilities. Of that number, 1,676 were solar PV CPGs issued in 2016.

<http://www.vtenergydashboard.org/90-by-2050/detail/energy-atlas-stats>

## **Municipal and Regional Planning**

A regional plan needs to conform to the State Comprehensive Energy Plan. In turn, municipal plans need to comply with the regional plan under Act 174. The municipal and regional planning standards were issued November 1. Guidance on the standards was issued March 2. The work-load to develop a municipal plan is time consuming, complicated, and with respect to some of the required elements such as transportation, almost meaningless. There is funding for regional commissions to help three towns in each commission accomplish the work of writing a compliant plan. Towns will not have compliant plans developed and approved for some time. In the meantime electric generation projects continue to be permitted. I have provided a copy of the standards for municipalities with this testimony. They are detailed, top-down and prescriptive.

The regional plan must address all renewable energy technologies. There is not the opportunity to say that a specific technology such as wind might be inappropriate for the area. The standards do not provide flexibility to incorporate or acknowledge that rapidly changing technology may significantly change the landscape both figuratively and literally. Nor do the standards acknowledge that there may be considerations other than renewable energy that municipal plans are required to address - maintenance of forest blocs, habitat connectivity, economic development, water quality, fragile areas, or housing needs.

The brass ring at the end of this process is that the Public Service Board will accord the town plan “substantial deference” in any Section 248 proceeding. We are not at all sure how the Public Service Board will handle that substantial deference.

### **VLCT Recommendations for Action**

We urge you to amend Act 174 in four respects to make it more workable for regions and municipalities.

The standards should allow regions or municipalities to make a determination that an area is not suitable for a specific technology.

The requirement for municipalities to address transportation in their plan should be deleted. That is an issue that realistically needs to be addressed on a regional and state level. Likewise requiring a municipal plan to consistent with “the distributed renewable generation and energy transformation categories of resources to meet the requirements of the Renewable Energy Standard under 30 V.S.A. sections 8004 and 8005” seems unreasonable.

We urge you to amend Act 174 so that as towns and regions are developing their Act 174 compliant energy plans, the Public Service Board accords currently adopted municipal plans substantial deference. We are providing an amendment that would accomplish those changes.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

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