Public Comment on H.51, H.175, H.214
Bill Marks
April 17, 2019

Greetings,

My name is Bill Marks. I practiced law in Burlington for many years. More recently, I was a co-plaintiff in a lawsuit brought by a group of citizens against Vt. Gas Systems (VGS), when it tried to dig a trench through Geprags Park in Hinesburg for its gas transmission pipeline. While VGS ultimately got its pipeline through our town park, we forced it to drill *underneath* the park, rather than trenching through its wetlands and cutting its trees.

I have also been involved in the arduous (and now successful) task of forcing VGS to pay for an independent expert who will attempt to determine its compliance record and the overall safety of its now completed pipeline. Because a few members of the Geprags Park citizen group dug into massive amounts of VGS records and correspondences, the PUC eventually determined that substantial non-compliance and safety issues may indeed exist in the pipeline. All this, despite VGS' many assurances to the contrary.

I mention all of the above because, in the course of these very lengthy and expensive lawsuits, I learned a great deal about the impact that the extraction and delivery of methane gas has on our environment. However, I also learned that the representatives of large corporations - like VGS - act (and speak) as if they have only one obligation; that is, to work for the best interests of their shareholders. I do not say this with any personal animosity toward VGS nor undue cynicism; it is simply a lesson I learned about VGS from first hand experience.

In the case of its installation of the entire pipeline, it became clear through the citizen group's research that VGS was attempting to complete its pipeline as quickly and cheaply as possible; knowing that there was minimal oversight by government regulators.

In the case of VGS' attempt to trench through a town park in Hinesburg, I learned that VGS was willing to ignore basic state municipal law that requires selectboards to hold a *public* vote before conveying interests in town-owned land. In our case, VGS accepted an easement deed to Geprags Park signed only by the town attorney, without any evidence that a public vote was held and approved by the majority of the select board. In fact, VGS entered into a *secret* arrangement approved by only two of the five selectboard members - of which not even the other three selectboard members were aware!

Also in the course of the Geprags Park case, VGS publicly testified that its proposed easement for trenching would impact a minimal amount of the park's wetlands - which the ANR accepted without doing its own investigation. That claim also turned out not to be true (based on the investigation by an independent wetlands expert we hired) and

resulted in VGS agreeing to the much more costly horizontal drilling rather than trenching.

I have read the written testimony of Atty. James Dumont submitted to your committee on or about 4/9/19, regarding these bills and H.214. I urge you to adopt the recommendations of Mr. Dumont and to advocate for the passage of these bills with the amendments suggested by him in his testimony before your committee.

Thank you. - Bill Marks