

To: Vermont Legislature Oversight Committee

December 9th, 2023

For Administrative Rules

From: Nancy Coseo

Subject: Solar Arrays in Design Review Districts

My husband and I are residents of Old Bennington. I currently serve on the Planning Commission for the Village. Like many, if not most of Vermonters, we fully support solar technology and fully recognize the need to reduce reliance on fossil fuels. We also live in a village that Vermont recognizes as historic and worth preserving. Clearly there are multiple reasons for this, attracting visitors and residents being at the top of that list.

The state has gone to considerable lengths in the past to protect historic buildings, corridors, and overlays. The state has designated Design Review Districts with clearly written laws that any changes in structure or use need to be reviewed by appropriate officers (DRB, Planning Commission, etc). The entire Village of Old Bennington was declared a Design Review District because every structure is listed in the National Registry of Historic Places. We believe that the ideals surrounding historic preservation and solar goals need not be mutually exclusive.

As you review existing laws regarding solar installations, we ask that you consider the following:

1. Ensure that the PUC give substantial deference to Design Review Districts that have set sighting/screening criteria for smaller installations (less than 15kw). Less than 15kw may be deemed a small installation by the state and not subject to sighting and screening regulations. But a 15kw array is a large installation in an historic neighborhood with cherished public vistas and neighbors in close proximity.
2. Extend the public comment period for smaller installations to 30 days. A public comment period of 10 days does not serve the public well and can put neighbors and village officers in difficult and potentially contentious situations.
3. Regulate that the PUC alert the Village Zoning Administrator that an application for any size solar installation in a Design Review District is being reviewed by the

- PUC. At the very least, this would alert the municipality and facilitate a conversation among neighbors that a substantial structure may be imminent.
4. We understand that a Certificate of Public Good replaces a Village Zoning Permit. We ask that a Village be allowed to require a Zoning Permit in designated Design Review Districts. We believe that allowing slightly increased oversight for solar installations in an historic district would not compromise Vermont's goals for reducing fossil fuels.

We believe the above measures would help preserve what Vermont believes worth preserving and will keep our historic villages pleasant and friendly places to live.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Nancy Coseo and Steve Korn

3 Monument Circle

Bennington, VT 05201