

My name is Andrew Zebrowski. I am a resident of Westmore, an abutting landowner to a proposed ITW project, and a member of the Westmore Planning and Zoning Committee. I also own and operate the Willoughby Lake Store, a hub for both our local community and the thousands of tourists who visit our region.

I am here today to strongly oppose H.527. While § 248a was originally intended as a temporary, streamlined measure for telecommunications, it has devolved into a permanent bypass of municipal authority. By extending this sunset once again, the legislature continues to strip Vermont towns of their right to determine the character of their own communities.

While the statute requires "substantial deference" to municipal plans, the reality is that the Public Utility Commission (PUC) frequently overrides local concerns regarding aesthetics, ridgeline protection, and site-specific impacts. This creates a profound disconnect: the values of our community are sidelined in favor of the mandates of out-of-area experts. As an abutter and a local official, I have seen firsthand how residents are forced to live with decisions made by those who have no stake in our landscape.

In Westmore, the "view" is not merely an aesthetic preference; it is the foundation of our rural economy. Our Town Plan explicitly identifies high-priority viewsheds as essential protected assets. These are the economic engines that bring visitors to the area. Visitors do not come to the Northeast Kingdom to see industrial towers on our ridgelines; they come for the pristine vistas that our local zoning laws work so hard to protect. By bypassing these protections, § 248a threatens the very visual integrity that drives Vermont's tourism brand.

Furthermore, the Lake Willoughby Natural Area is a designated National Natural Landmark. This federal recognition by the National Park Service identifies our landscape as one of the best examples of our nation's natural heritage. It is an inappropriate use of the "Certificate of Public Good" to allow a state-level commission to degrade a site of national standing through a streamlined process that lacks the rigorous environmental review of Act 250, particularly regarding forest fragmentation and scenic corridors.

Finally, the § 248a process is fundamentally inaccessible to the average Vermonter. The ePUC filing system is a technical and intimidating barrier. Without the transparent, face-to-face hearing process found in municipal zoning, residents feel shut out of decisions that directly impact their property values and quality of life.

Rather than simply extending a flawed sunset, I urge the legislature to allow § 248a to expire. We must develop a siting process that integrates modern telecommunications needs with the protective standards of Act 250 and local bylaws.

Please vote "No" on H.527. It is time to return siting authority to the communities most affected by these decisions. Let's keep Vermont local.

Respectfully,
Andrew Zebrowski
Westmore, VT