

Good afternoon - I am writing about the House Energy & Digital Infrastructure Committee considering H.527.

Although you may not get many comments on this - please know that MANY Vermonters are interested in this topic and concerned - alarmed even - at the increasing rapid rate of cell tower deployment in our hills. People are busy and not plugged into the legislative process and just don't know how and when to get involved or have the time.

I want to emphasize that **many of us appreciate how distinct Vermont is from almost everywhere else** in this country with our relatively intact landscape of forested unbroken ridge lines, clean watersheds and large tracts of roadless areas. These all go hand in hand. Step over into NH and you immediately see what a less regulated landscape looks like with infrastructure - from towers to homes atop hills and steep ridges.

Steep roads are stormwater conveyances - they turn what was a quickly-infiltrating slope which slows and spread stormwater, sinking into the groundwater where it recharges aquifers, into impervious surfaces that shunt stormwater quickly into ditches and our rivers increasing the "flashiness" of them and acute behavior during flood events. These roads make floods worse. And the conversation about climate change, Vermont's flood resiliency or lack thereof, and new roadways in steep forested areas need to go hand in hand.

What we've seen in Vermont is permitting process where **local citizens are left behind**, often not made aware of projects in a timely manner, have difficulty getting involved, and have little control compared to the State PUC due to the Public Good approach. The actual public good requires that not only are locals more involved and have more say in the planning direction of their landscapes, but also that various negatives of cell tower development are on the table with the highly emphasized potential positives - the all important "more connectivity."

We will all likely regret a future in Vermont where we've made our landscape look a lot like everywhere else - reducing our competitive advantage as a destination for beauty, while reducing our flood resiliency, damaging roadless wild areas and the the key wildlife habitat it offers, all to still have "dead zones" abound in our landscape due to the nature of our hilly terrain.

Cell reception in hilly places requires small cells - not towers

The only reliable way to get **consistent** cell reception to roadways in an undulated, hilly place like Vermont is to transmit the signal right where the use is - at the roads. Small cells on power poles do this and use existing infrastructure - which is why they are becoming the preferred method in many areas. Reception from remote towers via a new (almost always steep) roadways into some of the most intact roadless watersheds remaining in our state - will not only be destructive and regrettable for a State whose brand is unspoiled mountain ridges and watersheds - *it will also prove to be grossly inadequate at delivering the actual service many wanted*. This is a large part of the story of Vermont's failed attempts at delivering cellular service thus far. *Emergency response*

needs on all major roadways can actually be met in VT but not by tower transmitters in remote locations, only by many of them next to the roadways they serve.

Tower companies should not be able to override town boards and planning commissions. And neither should the PUC be able to override.

Thank you for attending to this issue in its' crucial complexity and import for Vermont's future.

Best,

Ben Falk,

Rochester and Moretown

802-343-9490 House Energy & Digital Infrastructure Committee considering H.527