

Statement before the Vermont Energy Generation Siting Policy Commission

Good morning. Yes, my name is Sam Swanson. I am a citizen of the City of South Burlington, where I have lived for the last 15 years. I live here with my wife Joyce Gallimore.

I welcome this opportunity to address this Commission. The work you are doing is extremely important. The siting, design, construction and operation of new renewable electric power supply to serve Vermont is extremely important to us all.

I have spent much of my work life addressing the environmental impacts of electric power production . Today I speak to you as an active member several community based organizations all in one way or another are addressing steps to slow the pace of climate change. I serve on the City of South Burlington's Energy Committee, am a member of the Ascension Lutheran Church congregation in South Burlington, and serve on the VT Interfaith Power & Light Board of Directors. Although I have been studied the environmental impacts of energy facilities for a very long time, this work in my community brings me in direct contact with the practical difficulties of sorting out difficult choices with my neighbors. I believe more than ever that Vermont must have an energy project permitting process that provides a fair and orderly process for reconciling sometimes conflicting community values.... the commitment to clean sustainable energy sources and the commitment to protect other features the Vermont environment.

The Certificate of Public Good process provides just such a orderly process that enables our neighbors to identify real problems, that offers the project developer the opportunity to address the merits of such problems and our community the promise that the difficult conflicts will be evaluated and addressed fairly. It also offers a framework for adapting to changing technology and to accumulating experience.

I believe that we very much need a public permitting process that enables us to address effectively the environmental impacts of siting renewable energy while providing a pathway for timely and balanced site permit decision making.

The permitting process must lay the foundation for progress. Progress requires that we succeed in deploying renewable projects and that we locate and design these projects to meet sometimes competing and hard to reconcile community objectives. The Public Service Board's Certificate of Public Good process has been developed and refined over many years to sort out and address difficult decisions. It provides a orderly process that balances Vermont's need for electricity production facilities with the need to avoid or mitigate environmental impacts associated with each project proposal.

I urge this Commission to embrace a siting strategy that builds upon the well tested Certificate of Public Good process.

We must find ways to facilitate the increased use of solar energy to meet our electricity needs. All electricity production produces environmental impacts but it clear that solar panels produce electricity at the lowest environmental cost of all the available options.

The impact of climate change on life systems worldwide is sobering. Our global ecosystem is precious but threatened. We must either drastically reduce energy use or find ways to site new very clean energy supply technology. Solar is the low impact option. All the options involve greater challenges than solar.

Properly designed solar electric panels can have negligible long term impacts on terrestrial ecosystems. Sites can be managed to preserve local flora and retain host site for local fauna. Nevertheless if we are going to meet a significant proportion each community's energy needs with solar energy, solar panels will become a visible part of our community, our landscape.

One of the best qualities of solar is the short lasting environmental footprint. These facilities do not create brownfields of contaminated land when they are disassembled at the end of their life. An effectively designed solar field can be disassembled and converted to other uses, for crops, for recreation, for schools, for homes at little cost.

I find that virtually every community scale solar project that has been proposed for South Burlington has encountered some objections. It has been my experience that the

Certificate of Public Good process offers citizens the opportunity to identify problems and provides the project the developer with a deliberative process where problems can be solved and questions answered... a process that addresses problems citizens identify while providing for a timely resolution of conflict.

Surely the existing Certificate of Public Good process can be improved; it should be modified to address real problems, lessons of experience that are emerging and may continue to emerge as we address gain additional experience. The work of this Commission offers the opportunity to learn from our yet quite limited experience siting these new technologies and to continue to adapt as our experience grows.

We need to embrace a siting practice that ensures that we can continue to build and operate new clean energy systems, a practice that encourages efforts to avoid or mitigate real environmental impacts. I believe that the support for solar is strong, it is not unanimous. We must ensure that real problems are addressed but that imagined problems do not create real barriers.

I recommend that we take measured steps that build upon the long energy siting experience embodied in the current practice, steps that nurture problem solving and that provide a means to reconcile our need for clean energy with other community goals. We must sustain a site permitting process that encourages innovation and that provides opportunities to learn from experience.

Thank you.

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My worklife

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