

Statement to the Solar Siting Task Force

09/17/15

I am here today as a concerned citizen, on my own time and expense, representing a rapidly growing majority of Vermonters who are just waking up to the fact that our countryside is being overwhelmed by unrestrained industrialization. I'd like to make a couple of points about what needs to be done to protect the unique Vermont landscape that we have been nurturing for decades.

First: It is time to stop using the deceitful term "solar farm", obviously dreamed up by some slick PR firm, especially in official discourse. Industrial solar plants are not, by any stretch of the imagination, "farms". In fact, they are the absolute antithesis of any common definition of a "farm". As a land use, they are very much more akin to the strip mines that have decimated Appalachia than to anything resembling a Vermont farm, although strip mines are not as permanent.

Secondly: Any solar power plant approval must include locked-in escrow funds for mandated (herbicide-free) maintenance and future decommissioning, to be set aside from their front-end subsidies and tax breaks. A decommissioning date-certain must be based on the realistically projected useful life of the technology, after which demolition and restoration of the land must be guaranteed. Wall Street is cashing in on the generous subsidies extorted from Vermont ratepayers: exploiting our farmland because it is cheap and expedient, and the front-end subsidies are highly profitable. These investors need to be held accountable.

Thirdly: All solar developments should, at the very least, be subject to the same standards established by Act 250 and local ordinances; as they are applied to any other industrial, commercial, or extractive development.

Finally: As a professional architect and land planner, I am not convinced that it is even possible to negate the negative impact of these large scale projects by simply imposing stricter siting standards. One case in point is the "Hinsdale" power plant in Charlotte which, only because of significant local opposition, was required to be set well back from the road and includes some required deciduous screening --- far more landscape mitigation than has been applied to most such projects. Yet it remains a major eyesore; highly visible, especially in winter. It appears from a mile away like the roof of a gigantic metal factory, significantly devaluing surrounding properties and permanently destroying a previously unspoiled viewshed. Such large scale destruction can not be mitigated.

This is not a landscaping problem, it's a state policy problem.

Therefore, I strongly recommend that a moratorium immediately be imposed on any additional industrial solar arrays on open farm or forest land in Vermont, at least until every single urban rooftop and parking lot in the state is completely saturated with maximum efficiency collectors. We need a Moratorium. Now!

Respectfully, Leonard Duffy

I am a licensed Architect, former chair of the Hinesburg and Chittenden Regional Planning Commissions, and co-chair of the 1990 ANR Design Guidelines Advisory Committee who has also served as an expert witness before Vermont courts, the Environmental Board and New York's APA on aesthetic issues. Since working on an early solar experiment at Penn State back in 1965, I have long been a supporter of well planned economically viable alternative energy.