



TOWN OF BARRE, VERMONT

OFFICE OF THE TOWN MANAGER

WEBSTERVILLE, VT 05678-0116

TELEPHONE: 802-479-9331

FAX: 802-479-9332

E-MAIL: offices@barretown.org

TOWN MANAGER:

Carl Rogers

crogers@barretown.org

December 1, 2015

Christopher Recchia, Commissioner
Public Service Department
Solar Siting Task Force
112 State Street, Third Floor
Montpelier, VT 05620

Dear Commissioner Recchia and members of the Solar Siting Task Force:

The Town of Barre Selectboard and Planning Commission jointly submit this letter which is intended to be used by the Solar Siting Task Force which you chair. As you know, solar siting has become a hot topic over the last year or so as many Town's in Vermont have seen an explosion in solar development. While the Town of Barre generally supports solar development, we have long supported regulations controlling solar permitting be enhanced so that municipalities have more meaningful input for sitings in our community.

The Solar Siting Task Force charge is to study the design, siting, and regulatory review of solar electric generation facilities and to provide a report in the form of proposed legislation with the rationale for each proposal. Act 56 of the 2016 General Assembly made positive steps towards improving the siting process by requiring increased setbacks, some landscaping and screening flexibility, and automatic party status at section 248 proceedings, there remains many points of concerns for Barre Town.

To help put forth our concerns and provide meaningful suggestions to the Solar Siting Task Force, both the Selectboard and Planning Commission have been meeting jointly. A public hearing regarding solar siting was also held jointly on November 17, 2015. Over two dozen concerned Barre Town residents attended this hearing and contributed to the points listed below.

It is the hope of both the Town of Barre Selectboard and Planning Commission that the Solar Siting Task Force will give careful consideration to the very important topics below. We understand that this is a tough issue but hope that with everybody working together, solutions can be found to mitigate concerns of people on all sides of this issue.

1. Solar development should strongly be encouraged on existing impervious services and/or existing brownfields. Taking advantage of buildings and parking lots where development has already occurred and likely has already cleared many hurdles faced by solar developers such as environmental limitations, availability of three-phase power, aesthetics pushback, and land deemed unsuitable for most other uses could go a long way towards providing areas for solar development while at the same time limiting the need to disturb undeveloped areas.
2. Allow municipalities more input. We understand that there is a major concern from some that if Town's have more say it would hamper the ability to reach state goals for renewable

energy. However, it also may make solar development more harmonious if handled like other commercial uses with local public input.

3. Because of uncertainty as to what additional local control may be given to Town's, here are a few other suggestions that would offer Town's some mitigation measures.
 - a. Allow Town's to determine best locations for solar development. This could be done with solar zones and or overlay districts.
 - b. Limit how much solar any single Town should be expected to contribute to the overall solar built-out or limit how much solar can be developed over a certain period of time. Help prevent Town's from the undue burden that solar can bring.
 - c. Limiting the number of solar projects in a town would also allow Towns to study the impact on property values solar development may have.
 - d. Offer more input from municipalities with regard to setbacks. In other words, every site is different, a reduced setback on one side to allow more space on another may be better than having a standard setback everywhere.
 - e. Give more weight to individual concerns over aesthetics, not just community wide.
4. Unless proposed by the municipality, solar projects should not be allowed in industrial parks or tax increment financing districts (TIF) especially ones that have already invested in infrastructure. Industrial Parks and TIF districts are intended to boost municipal economic development and job creation. Land for this purpose is limited and solar development does very little to support the goals of either.
5. Allow special case proximity solar development. In other words, if a site makes sense and there is little to no opposition, the site should not be limited to the number of projects it can have. The Town of Barre has a site with a developed 500Kw project. The site has limited visibility, its use is limited, and has very good access to three-phase power, yet another 500Kw project was not allowed because of its proximity to the first one. A system could be developed to help in determining sites that may be suitable for proximity location.
6. Allow a local benefit. Neighbors and the municipality should be able to realize the benefit of hosting a solar project nearby instead of credits entirely going somewhere else.
7. Loosen wetland rules that would allow fringe siting along wetlands where development is already restricted and whereas solar development will have little impact on the wetland as a whole, especially in the buffer zone.
8. Because of tax payer subsidies for most solar development, host landowner should be required to keep some or all of remaining land open for recreation such as walking, x-country skiing, hunting, ect. This would especially work well on larger tracts of land.
9. Consider eliminating tariffs on three-phase power allowing expansion into areas not currently served. Doing so may allow access to more suitable solar development sites.

10. Decommissioning. What happens to the solar arrays once its useful life has passed is a major concern. Many landowners include decommissioning language in their lease agreement but not all do or the language is insufficient. Decommissioning must be part of the permitting process and included as part of the Certificate of Public Good. The public good is certainly not served if these now old worn out panels are not removed and disposed of properly. Hazardous materials contained within the panels needs special handling just like any other potentially dangerous substances not to mention what an eye sore old and unused panels would be.

Frankly one of the most disturbing aspects of hosting a solar facility is the inability for municipalities to tax the projects as they would other real or personal property. The discounted cash flow approach which was written in to state law provides a minimum 70% discount for solar projects which when combined with all the other town restrictions is alarming for communities facing this issue. While this aspect may not directly fit into the Solar Siting Task Force charge, it is a very important component overall. The legislature needs to be lobbied to review this significant exemption enjoyed by solar developers at the expense of local taxpayers.

We realize that this is a complicated subject without easy answers and thank you for your consideration of our concerns and the points outlined above.

Sincerely,



Jeff Blow
Town of Barre Selectboard
Chair

Sincerely,



Cedric Sanborn
Town of Barre Planning Commission
Chair