

STATE OF VERMONT
PUBLIC SERVICE BOARD

Petition of Georgia Mountain Community Wind, LLC,)
for a Certificate of Public Good, pursuant to 30 V.S.A.)
Section 248, authorizing the construction and operation)
of a 5-wind turbine electric generation facility, with)
associated electric and interconnection facilities, on)
Georgia Mountain in the Towns of Milton and Georgia,)
Vermont, to be known as the “Georgia Mountain)
Community Wind Project”)

Docket No. 7508

PREFILED DIRECT TESTIMONY OF
JEAN VISSERING

ON BEHALF OF THE
VERMONT DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SERVICE

September 18, 2009

Summary: Ms. Vissering analyzes the potential aesthetic impacts of the proposed Georgia Mountain Community Wind Project on the scenic resources of the surrounding area under the Quechee Test. Ms. Vissering also assesses the validity of the aesthetic analysis provided by the petitioner in this proceeding

Direct Testimony
of
Jean Vissering

1 Q. Would you please state your name?

2 A. Jean Vissering.
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5 Q. What is your business address?

6 A. My office is located in East Montpelier, Vermont. The address is 3700
7 North Street, Montpelier, VT 05602.
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10 Q. Who is your current employer and what position do you hold?

11 A. I am self employed and principal of Jean Vissering Landscape
12 Architecture, a firm specializing in visual resource planning, visual impact
13 assessment, landscape design and community design.
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16 Q. Please describe your background and qualifications?

17 A. I have 35 years of experience working on projects in Vermont and
18 elsewhere. After receiving both undergraduate and graduate degrees in
19 Landscape Architecture, I worked for the State of Vermont Department of
20 Forests, Parks and Recreation designing state parks and preparing land
21 management plans. I left to accept a joint position at the University of
22 Vermont's School of Natural Resources and Plant and Soil Science where I
23 taught courses at the graduate and undergraduate levels in park design,
24 landscape design, and visual resource planning. In 1997 I opened my own
25 landscape architectural firm and have been involved in numerous projects
26 throughout New England.

27 Scenic resource planning projects include developing scenic resource

1 planning tools for the town of Huntington and City of Montpelier. I have
2 provided visual impact assessments for housing subdivisions, ski areas,
3 transmission lines, and communication towers, often on behalf of Towns,
4 Regional Planning Commissions and citizen organizations. I became involved
5 in wind energy issues in 2002 when I helped facilitate discussions with
6 numerous stakeholders in Vermont in a series of meeting sponsored by the
7 Vermont Public Service Department. I wrote *Wind Energy and Vermont's*
8 *Scenic Landscape* outlining areas of consensus regarding the design and siting
9 of wind energy projects in Vermont (available on line at the Vermont DPS
10 website). More recently I authored a chapter on aesthetic impacts in
11 *Environmental Impacts of Wind-Energy Projects* by the National Research
12 Council of the National Academies. I have spoken around the country on the
13 issue, and have provided informal and formal assessments for several wind
14 projects including the Deerfield Wind project in southern Vermont on behalf of
15 PPM, the Redington/Black Nubble Wind Project in Maine on behalf of the
16 Appalachian Trail Conservancy, the Granite Reliable Wind Project in New
17 Hampshire on behalf of Granite Reliable Power, LLC, and the Kibby Wind
18 Project on behalf of TransCanada. I have also worked on behalf of Towns and
19 Regional Planning Commissions to provide independent evaluations of
20 proposed wind projects and to ensure a thorough review. I worked with the
21 Town of Londonderry and the Bennington County Regional Planning
22 Commission in independent reviews of proposed wind projects on Glebe
23 Mountain and Little Equinox.

24 My resume is provided as Appendix 4.
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27 Q. Have you provided testimony before the Public Service Board in a Section 248
28 case?

29 A. Yes. I testified before the PSB on several occasions including the
30 Northwest Reliability Project (Docket # 6860) on behalf of Addison County

1 Regional Planning Commission and the Town of Middlebury; a small wind
2 turbine on behalf of the Foundation for a Sustainable Future (Docket #NM-
3 297); and the Deerfield Wind Project (Docket #7250).

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6 Q. Have you been retained by the Vermont Department of Public Service in
7 connection with the application for a Certificate of Public Good by Georgia
8 Mountain Community Wind LLC?

9 A. Yes, I have.

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12 Q. What services have you been asked to provide in connection with that
13 representation?

14 A. I have been asked to review the work of the applicant's consultants
15 regarding the potential aesthetic impact of the proposed wind project, to
16 evaluate the methods and conclusions drawn by the consultants, and to prepare
17 an independent assessment of the aesthetic impacts of the proposed project.

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20 Q. What steps did you take to familiarize yourself with the project?

21 A. I have read all documents submitted by the petitioner relevant to
22 aesthetics. These include the prefiled testimony and all exhibits submitted by
23 David Raphael, John Zimmerman, and Hope Luhman; and the Site Plan and
24 Road Profiles submitted by Peter Cross (PET-2-19). I read the full transcript of
25 the public hearing held on June 9, 2009 at the Georgia Elementary School, and
26 attended the Site Visit held on July 30, 2009. I have reviewed all relevant local
27 and regional planning documents and have examined internet sites for
28 information regarding local attractions. I made approximately five visits to the
29 area during the summer months and documented viewpoints from numerous
30 interstate, state and local roads and recreation areas.

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1 Q. In connection with your testimony on these issues have you prepared Exhibits?

2 A. Yes. I prepared a document titled "*Aesthetic Impact Assessment:*
3 *Georgia Mountain Community Wind Project*" dated September 4, 2009. This
4 document accompanies this testimony as Exhibit DPS-JV-1.

5

6 Q. Can you describe this exhibit?

7 A. Yes. This document provides a detailed assessment of the aesthetic
8 assessment of the proposed project employing the Quechee Test as the primary
9 methodology of review. The report provides a description of the project, a
10 description of the surrounding area within a 10-mile radius including notable
11 scenic resources, outlines potential visibility of the project, and describes the
12 characteristics of these views and the extent to which the project may degrade
13 these views. As outlined in the Quechee Test, the report examines whether the
14 proposed project would violate a community standard, would appear offensive
15 to the average person, and whether adequate mitigation measure were employed
16 by the applicant to reduce potential visual impacts. In addition the report
17 provides a critique of the methodology and conclusions drawn by the
18 petitioner's aesthetic consultant, Landworks.

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21 Q. Did you evaluate the applicant's Viewshed Analysis and Simulations?

22 A. Yes. We prepared our own Viewshed Analysis Map using similar
23 parameters. (Exhibit DPS-JV-1 Appendix 1) We also selected two of the
24 applicant's simulation photographs and prepared our own on the same
25 photograph to determine the accuracy of their simulations. (Exhibit DPS-JV-1
26 Appendix 3)

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1 Q. Did you prepare additional simulations to supplement those prepared by the
2 applicant?

3 A. Yes, we prepared two additional simulation photographs from locations
4 considered to be visually sensitive due to their scenic quality and proximity.
5 (Exhibit DPS-JV-1 Appendix 3) The two simulation locations are Route 104A
6 in Georgia overlooking the Lamoille River; and Georgia Mountain Road which
7 is the closest public viewpoint with visibility of the entire project.
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9 Q. What were your conclusions and how do they compare with the analysis
10 prepared by the applicant?

11 A. I agree with Mr. Raphael that the project would not result in “undue
12 adverse impacts on the scenic and natural beauty of the area.” However, it was
13 also my conclusion that the Landworks report fails to identify and adequately
14 describe the extent of scenic resources in the surrounding area and the adverse
15 impacts that are likely to result due to the scenic quality of much of the area, the
16 frequency of views toward the project ridge, and the relative proximity of many
17 of these views. I concur however, that these adverse impacts do not rise to the
18 level of undue. They will not appear “shocking,” or unduly degrade the most
19 important scenic resources in the area which include Arrowhead Mountain
20 Lake, the Lamoille River, and Lake Champlain. While Georgia Mountain is a
21 “noteworthy” landform in the area due to its height, it is not a distinctive
22 landform in its shape or vegetative characteristics. Views of the mountain from
23 surrounding public areas are not ones for which an undisturbed natural
24 landscape is critical to their enjoyment. No public documentation provides
25 guidance as to specific characteristics of Georgia Mountain that should be
26 protected or in what manner. The relatively small number of turbines, the
27 cultural and evolving nature of the surrounding landscape, as well as the
28 presence of an existing communications tower on the mountain all help to
29 reduce the relative contrast and prominence of the proposed project within the

1 area.

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4 Q. Did you evaluate the impact of the project relative to ambient noise conditions?

5 A. This analysis was provided separately under contract by me by Richard
6 Letty of KM Chng Inc. of Burlington, Massachusetts. He has provided prefiled
7 testimony and Exhibits explaining his findings and conclusions. His conclusions
8 suggest that while the project may be audible from a few residences in certain
9 atmospheric conditions, noise levels would not exceed standards that have been
10 identified in other cases.

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12 Q. Does this conclude your testimony at this time?

13 A. Yes it does.