

STATE OF VERMONT
PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION

Petition of Chelsea Solar LLC, pursuant to	)	
30 V.S.A. § 248, for a certificate of public	)	
good authorizing the installation and	)	
operation of the “Chelsea Solar Project,” a	)	
2.0 MW solar electric generation facility	)	
located off Willow Road in Bennington,	)	
Vermont	)	Docket No. 17-5024-PET

PREFILED TESTIMONY OF MARU LEON

June 22, 2018

Exhibit

Exhibit ML-MAAC-1 wedding photo

Summary of Testimony:

Maru Leon is co-owner of Mt. Anthony Country Club. In her testimony she provides facts about the aesthetic impact of the Chelsea Solar development on the Country Club, explains the importance of the views of natural areas for her customers, and discusses the economic situation in Bennington and the negative impact that commercial solar development on the scenic hillside located in the Town’s Rural Conservation District will have on her business.

PREFILED TESTIMONY OF MARU LEON

Q1. Please state your name, occupation and address.

A1. Maru Leon, co-owner of Mt. Anthony Country Club with my husband, David Griffin. I am a Graphic Designer and Marketing Consultant, Event Planner. I reside on the grounds of the golf course at Mt. Anthony Country Club at 1 Bank Street, Bennington, Vermont.

Q2. Please describe your professional experience.

A2. I have worked in graphic design and marketing for over 33 years. I came to this country to study graphic design at Parsons School of Design in NYC. One of the reasons for moving to Bennington besides our new business venture to restore the golf course where my husband learned to play golf and grew up was the beauty of this rural and unique area. One of my main goals when marketing the property is to emphasize through visual communication the spectacular views as a feeling and a real experience with meaning. Being so close to cities such as Albany, NYC and Boston, Bennington is relatively close at only 3-4 hours and once you arrive here you feel you could be 20 hours away because of its beauty.

Q3. Have you previously testified before the Public Utility Commission or in other judicial or administrative proceedings?

A3. No

Q4. What is the purpose of your testimony?

A4. To present our alarming concerns regarding the developments being proposed for Chelsea Solar which will change the scenery and views of our valley and Town and the golf course, views that been enjoyed for years, and if approved would violate Bennington's Town Plan.

Q5. What documents have you reviewed in preparation of your testimony?

A5. The files and documents available at the Public Utility Commission website on ePUC.

Q6. How long have you owned the Mt. Anthony Country Club?

A6. 11 years

Q7. What issues have you dealt with since becoming the owner of the Mt. Anthony Country Club?

A7. A national recession and a very challenging local economy. Hurricane Irene flooded our golf course with the overflowing of the Walloomsac River which borders our golf course.

Q8. Please describe the location of the Mt. Anthony Country Club in the context of the Town of Bennington.

A8. We are located off Bank Street in the center of town, bordering the historic district of Old Bennington.

Q9. Please discuss the views from the Mt. Anthony Country Club and in particular, locations from which the proposed Chelsea Solar project would be visible?

A9. The view to the proposed site for the Chelsea Solar arrays is visible from the time you enter the property. It is seen from multiple angles and locations throughout the golf course.

Q10. Please provide the type of feedback you have had from your customers regarding the views from the Country Club.

A10. Our members and daily guests both in the Clubhouse and golf course are always raving about this secluded location in the middle of town where one can enjoy playing golf, dining al fresco or hosting weddings with our pristine 110 acres as our backdrop. Our patrons love the views and many times request or book a golf cart to drive around the golf course even though they are not golfers, just to see the views.

How Walmart would affect our views was a common question and concern when they were building the expansion. We shared everyone's concern and worked hard to try to prevent the expansion because of the potential negative impact on our views. Our concerns have proven to have been accurate.

Q11. How will the views change for weddings couples and their wedding parties that use the views in their photographs?

A11. They will be affected, as our wedding groups take golf carts to different locations in the golf course to take photographs. [See Exhibit ML-MAAC-1]

Q12. The petitioner's aesthetics expert has considered only views from the Welcome Center and within about 1500 feet from the proposed Chelsea Solar project. Mt. Anthony Country Club is further away. Does the distance mitigate the aesthetic impact from your property?

A12. No the distance does not ease the aesthetic effect; it is seen from our property and farther away.

Q13. How does Chelsea Solar compare to the images in the Town Plan that show what is and is not acceptable in the Rural Conservation District?

A13. The proposed Chelsea Solar is in the Rural Conservation District which does not allow degradation of the natural environment (see images from the Petitioner's Exhibit CS-BW-26, *Bennington RCON Design Standards* on page 4).

Q14. Please discuss how the views from Mt. Anthony Country Club have changed over time, and why this project is such a concern to you?

A14. When we purchased the Club in 2006, the highway bypass was already built but the expansion of Walmart was a bigger worry as it was closer. It proved true as the massive clearing they did of the forested area between the Walloomsac and their property line was practically cleared and it is now visible and not aesthetically

pleasing in the opinion of our daily golfers and members. Our scenic views cannot absorb more degrading.

Q15. Is there anything else you think the Public Utility Commission should know?

A15. Painters, Watercolorists and Photographers that reside in the region have been photographing the area and views for decades. It is one of our biggest assets and the erosion of the scenery will change the way these artists make a living and the way Bennington has been trying to recover from the downturn in the economy.

Q16. Does this conclude your testimony?

A16. Yes.