



WISDOM & POWER LLC

VIA EMAIL

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Ms. Judith Whitney, Clerk
Vermont Public Utility Commission 112 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05702

May 13, 2019

RE: Case No. 19-0855-RULE, Proposed revisions to Vermont Public Utility Commission Rule

5.100 Dear Commissioners:

I am providing these written comments regarding the proposed revisions to Vermont Public Utility Commission Rule 5.100 individually as a citizen of Vermont, an owner of a small business in Vermont and as a member of the Norwich Selectboard. These comments are mine only and do not reflect any policy position of the Norwich Selectboard. I am specifically commenting on Section 5.103's definition of "preferred sites."

Vermont's Net-Metering Rules play an important role in advancing the State's energy goals to increase renewable energy production and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The current Net-Metering Rules also allow municipalities and regional planning commissions to influence how renewable energy projects are sited, which I believe has been very helpful in granting a greater voice to local populations in energy project siting decisions.

The proposed Rules eliminate the ability of municipalities and regional planning commissions to designate "preferred sites" through a joint letter. With that proposed change, the only ability for municipalities to influence this important designation of preferred sites would be to identify specific preferred site locations in municipal plans. I oppose that change for the following reasons:

1. Enhanced energy plans are valuable, but enhanced energy plans are complicated, and take a long period of time for some municipalities to prepare and adopt. Most municipalities have not yet adopted them. In Norwich we have the benefit of a very active Energy Committee and a professional fulltime Planning Director and we still are in the early stages of adopting such a Plan. This proposed Rule change could negatively impact those municipalities since they would be unable to designate preferred sites in their community.



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2. Many adopted plans do not name specific preferred sites, in some cases in reliance on the ability to seek such designations in the joint letter. Municipal enhanced energy plans are not currently ready to completely replace the function of the preferred site letter.
3. It would be impossible for an enhanced energy plan to foresee all good solar project sites. Once Adopted, enhanced energy plans will be cumbersome to change, especially if incorporated into Town Plans. The preferred site letter provides a complementary process to allow flexibility in considering new facts and new sites that may not have been considered previously.
4. I have found the preferred site letter process to be valuable. It is a tool that encourages coordination between municipalities, regional planning commissions, solar developers and landowners early on in the process. Norwich has engaged in these discussions now for three different sites and I think all constituents have appreciated the availability of this process. I believe that this early coordination has ultimately resulted in better projects, with greater community support.

For these reasons, I respectfully request that the PUC keep the ability to designate preferred sites via a letter from the legislative body, local planning commission and regional planning commission.

The term "letter of support" has caused some confusion in some municipalities. Requiring a "joint letter" has been problematic; see VAPDA's May 13, 2019 letter on these proposed Rules for more discussion about that. Therefore, the SWCRPC respectfully requests that the PUC consider modifying the Rules in Section 5.103 Definitions for "Preferred Site" (7):

"A specific location designated in a duly adopted municipal plan under 24 V.S.A. chapter 117 for the siting of a renewable energy plant or specific type or size of renewable energy plant, provided that the plant meets the siting criteria recommended in the plan for the location; or a specific location that is identified in a joint letter of support from the municipal legislative body and municipal and regional planning commissions in the community where the net-metering system will be located."

Thank you for your consideration.

John Langhus
Owner, Wisdom & Power LLC
Selectboard Member, Norwich VT