

**STATE OF VERMONT
PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION**

Petition of Novus Buck Solar LLC for a	)	
Certificate of Public Good, pursuant to 30	)	
V.S.A. § 248, authorizing the installation	)	
and operation for a 4.999 MW ground-	)	Case No. 26-____-PET
mounted solar array in Newport Town,	)	
Vermont to be known as the	)	
“Novus Buck Solar Project”	)	

PREFILED DIRECT TESTIMONY OF MICHAEL WILLARD

May 7, 2026

Summary: Mr. Willard’s testimony addresses the proposed Novus Buck Solar Project’s compliance with Section 248 (b)(1) and (b)(5) pertaining to the orderly development of the region and aesthetics.

Exhibits:

NBS-MW-1 – Resume

**NBS-MW-2 – Aesthetic Assessment and Orderly Development
Report**

Appendix A: Project Maps

Appendix B: Photographic Inventory of Existing Conditions

Appendix C: Landscape Mitigation Plans

Appendix D: Regional and Town Plan Excerpts

1 **Q1. Please state your name, occupation, and business address.**

2 A1. My name is Michael Willard. I am a licensed Landscape Architect with the State of
3 Vermont and the Director of Landscape Architecture for VHB’s Vermont office. My
4 business address is 20 Winooski Falls Way, Suite 400B, Winooski, Vermont.
5

6 **Q2. Please describe your background and qualifications.**

7 A2. I am a Vermont licensed Landscape Architect. I received my degree in Architecture from
8 Vermont Technical College in 1992. My resume is attached as ***Exhibit NBS-MW-1***.
9

10 **Q3. What is the purpose of your testimony?**

11 A3. The purpose of my testimony is to describe the work that I have conducted regarding the
12 proposed Novus Buck Solar Project (the “Project”), introduce the Aesthetic Assessment
13 and Orderly Development Report that I prepared regarding the Project (submitted as
14 ***Exhibit NBS-MW-2***), and provide my opinion regarding the Project’s compliance with
15 the requirements of Section 248 with regard to aesthetics (§ 248(b)(5)) and orderly
16 development of the region (§ 248(b)(1)).
17

18 **Q4. Have you previously testified before the Public Utility Commission?**

19 A4. Yes. I have provided prefiled testimony, affidavits, and/or exhibits on behalf of a number
20 of projects, including recent cases such as Fair Haven Solar (24-2945-PET) and
21 Shaftsbury Solar (23-1447-PET).
22

1 **Q5. Please describe the work you have done for this Project.**

2 A5. To evaluate potential aesthetic impacts due to the proposed 4.999 megawatt (MW) solar
3 electric generation project, I performed visual and viewshed analyses, conducted a
4 desktop review and field study, and undertook document research and review. This work
5 is described in more detail in the aesthetics assessment and orderly development report.
6 *Exhibit NBS-MW-2.* I also reviewed the Town and Regional plans to evaluate
7 recommendations and land conservation measures contained within the plans that would
8 apply to the Project site, which is also addressed in my report.

10 **Q6. What other information is in your aesthetics and orderly development report?**

11 A6. In addition to detailing the methodology of my analysis and my conclusions regarding
12 the Project's compliance with the Section 248 criteria on aesthetics and orderly
13 development, the report includes the following supporting attachments: a viewshed map,
14 a photographic inventory of views from the field investigation of potential visibility, a
15 landscape mitigation plan, and relevant excerpts from the Town and Regional plans.
16 *Exhibit NBS-MW-2.*

18 **Q7. Please briefly describe the Project site and the surrounding area.**

19 A7. The Project parcel contains an open gravel pit extraction operation, and the Project site
20 will be located on portions of the Project parcel that were previously disturbed as part of
21 this operation. The lands surrounding the Project site are a mixture of rural residential
22 and commercial development, including open agricultural fields, hedge rows, rolling hills

1 and heavily forested areas. The Project is also bordered by Vermont Routes 100 and 105.

2 The Newport Center Cemetery is located across Route 105 from the Project parcel.

3
4 **SECTION 248 CRITERIA**

5 **Aesthetics (Visual) – 30 V.S.A. § 248(b)(5)**

6 **Q8. Please describe the nature of the Project’s viewshed.**

7 A8. My findings and conclusions regarding aesthetics are documented in a report with several
8 figures. The report is submitted in this proceeding as ***Exhibit NBS-MW-2***. As detailed in
9 my report, the existing site contains a gravel pit operation with open, disturbed terrain.
10 See, e.g., Viewpoints 10 and 11 in Attachment B to ***Exhibit NBS-MW-2***. Potential
11 visibility from surrounding roads and nearby residences is limited, with the exception of
12 specific views from segments of VT Route 100S, VT Route 100W, Niles Road, Buck
13 Road, and a private residence at 553 VT Route 100W. As discussed further in my Report,
14 these identified views are limited by intervening topography, existing vegetation,
15 structures, distance, viewing geometry, and duration of view. To further mitigate
16 potential visibility, Petitioner proposes to install a mixture of deciduous and evergreen
17 landscape screening along the northern, western and southern edge of the Project site that
18 will harmonize with the surrounding native plant material. This proposed landscaping
19 will help provide year-around visual mitigation. For further details, see ***Exhibit NBS-***
20 ***MW-2***.

1 **Q9. Will the Project have an adverse effect on aesthetics or the scenic or natural beauty**
2 **of the area?**

3 A9. As described in the analysis and conclusion that is included in my report, the introduction
4 of a solar generation facility of this size that is visible from portions of VT Route 100S,
5 VT Route 100W, Buck Road, Niles Road, and a private residence at 553 VT Route 100W
6 does pose a change in the landscape from existing conditions. Due to this fact and given
7 how the Quechee Analysis has been applied in other cases, it is my opinion that the
8 Project would result in an “adverse” impact to the aesthetics of the area. See additional
9 detail in *Exhibit NBS-MW-2*.

10
11 **Q10. Will the Project have an undue adverse effect on aesthetics or the scenic or natural**
12 **beauty of the area under the second prong of the Quechee test?**

13 A10. No. A review of the Project under the second part of the Quechee test found that the
14 Project will not have an undue adverse effect on aesthetics or the scenic or natural beauty
15 of the area. The Petitioner has taken steps to reduce the potential visibility of the Project
16 from surrounding roads and nearby residences through site selection on a previously
17 disturbed industrial gravel pit, and a project design that retains existing vegetative buffers
18 to the north and dense vegetative buffers to the east as well as taking advantage of
19 surrounding topography. In addition, Petitioner is proposing a robust landscape
20 mitigation plan that will help screen the Project further during both leaf-on and leaf-off
21 conditions.

22 These measures have resulted in a Project with limited visibility to the
23 surrounding area. As reflected in our supporting documents and analysis, the limited

1 potential visibility from surrounding roads, residences, and the lack of any effect on
2 identified scenic resources, public lands, or recreation resources limits the potential
3 impacts from the viewpoint of an average person. Additionally, the Project will be
4 located on the site of an existing gravel extraction operation of which the surrounding
5 area has current views. The introduction of a solar facility on this site will not be
6 shocking and offensive given these factors.

7 Furthermore, there are no clear written community standards in the Town or
8 Regional plans that the Project will conflict with. The Project avoids undue adverse
9 impacts on any natural resources and takes advantage of a previously-disturbed extraction
10 site, which is a preferred area for solar facility locations under the Regional Plan.

11 For these reasons, we conclude that the Project complies with the second prong of
12 the Quechee Analysis. The Project will not be considered shocking or offensive to the
13 average person, and the Project will not violate any clearly written community standard
14 intended to preserve the aesthetics or scenic beauty of the area. The Project incorporates
15 reasonable siting and significant landscape mitigation efforts to reduce potential visibility
16 and harmonize the Project with its surroundings. Therefore, the Project will not have an
17 undue adverse impact on aesthetics. See also *Exhibit NBS-MW-2* for further detail.

18
19 **Orderly Development – 30 V.S.A. § 248(b)(1)**

20 **Q11. Will the Project unduly interfere with the orderly development of the region?**

21 A11. No, as further discussed in *Exhibit NBS-MW-2*, the Project will not unduly interfere with
22 the orderly development of the region. Having reviewed the Town and Regional plans
23 and documents, and applying the standards of due consideration to the Town Plan and

1 Regional Plan and substantial deference to the enhanced Regional Energy Plan, I
2 conclude that the Project does not conflict with any land conservation measures or other
3 applicable provisions in these Plans and will not unduly interfere with the orderly
4 development of the region. No land conservation measures were found in these
5 documents that would be affected by the Project. The siting of the Project is consistent
6 with the character and planned use at the Project site without impacting areas prioritized
7 for conservation or protection, and the Project will help meet energy goals outlined in
8 Vermont's Comprehensive Energy Plan.

9
10 **Q12. Does the Newport Town Plan contain any land conservation measures or specific**
11 **policies that are specific to the Project site or surrounding area, and if so, does the**
12 **Project comply with such provisions?**

13 A12. No. There are no specific land conservation measures in the Newport Town Plan that
14 would be affected by the Project, and the Project is not located in protected or otherwise
15 described conservation areas or open space. See *Exhibit NBS-MW-2*.

16
17 **Q13. Does the Regional Plan contain land conservation measures or specific policies**
18 **regarding the orderly development of the region that are specific to the Project site**
19 **or surrounding area, and if so, does the Project comply with such provisions?**

20 A13. No, the Regional Plan does not contain any specific land conservation measures or
21 policies that would be affected by the Project. The Project is located within identified
22 areas mapped as "Prime Ground Mounted Solar" with "no constraints" and/or "possible
23 constraints;" it is not located in protected or otherwise described conservation areas or

1 open space and will avoid undue adverse impacts to significant natural communities and
2 sites. Moreover, the Regional Plan identifies “preferred locations” for solar siting which
3 includes “Earth extraction sites (e.g. gravel pits, quarries), active or abandoned.” *See*
4 *Exhibits NBS-AB-2; NBS-MW-2; NBS-DB-2.* The Project is consistent with these
5 provisions.
6

7 **Q14. Has the Town of Newport adopted a municipal bylaw under 24 V.S.A. § 4414(15) or**
8 **a municipal ordinance under 24 V.S.A. § 2291(28) containing screening**
9 **requirements that apply to a ground-mounted solar electric generation facility?**

10 A14. No, based upon available information we have not found any municipal bylaw or
11 ordinance adopted by the Town that contains solar screening requirements. *Exhibit*
12 *NBS-MW-2.*
13

14 **Q15. Does this conclude your testimony at this time?**

15 A15. Yes, it does.