

BESS Compromises New Housing in Vergennes

The primary reason I oppose the construction of a battery energy storage system on Panton Road is because it jeopardizes more important opportunities for Vergennes, specifically new housing. My position is informed by a deep concern about the following serious problems Vermont's communities are facing,

1. An aging population
2. A severe housing shortage
3. A population that is too small (this article explains why #3 does not contradict #2: <https://letsbuildhomes.org/news/2026-04-30-big-houses-smaller-households/>)

All of the above are at the root of a problem that is directly resulting in a cost of living in Vermont that is increasingly unaffordable. They also directly contribute to our high cost of health care and our difficulties in supporting our rural school systems. It is my belief that every city and town in Vermont should be laser-focused on addressing these 3 realities.

The solution is not an easy one, but creating more housing, especially the right type of housing, is widely considered to be key to alleviating these problems. There are two reputable coalitions trying to tackle the problems I am referencing, and their websites are a great place to learn more,

1. <https://vtfuturesproject.org>
2. <https://letsbuildhomes.org>

David and Carrie Hathaway planned to build a 5-home development, right here in Vergennes, on their property which abuts the land where the new battery energy storage facility is slated to be located. I have seen the spec drawings for their development, which shows that some of these homes would be as close as 80-100 feet away from the BESS. The Hathaway's housing development has already received preliminary approval to apply for financing through the State's new Community and Housing Infrastructure Program (CHIP), which was recently adopted to facilitate projects like the Hathaway's, in an attempt to address the State's housing shortage without raising property taxes.

I applaud the Hathaways for contributing to the vibrancy of our little city by purchasing a dilapidated 18th century home along the southern gateway into Vergennes and investing considerable sweat equity and financial resources to restore it to its current beautiful state. I believe it reflects well on Vergennes when the many people who drive down 22A see homes that are lovingly maintained. I also applaud them for contributing to the vibrancy of our city by planning to build 5 new homes, 4 of which are slated to be smaller, 2-bedroom homes, which is the type of home that is in high demand in Vermont and is touted by Let's Build Homes. THIS is exactly the type of growth we should all support for Vergennes, and for the entire state and THIS is where our priorities should lie.

Battery energy storage systems serve a valuable purpose, but they need to be appropriately located, away from homes. They not only pose environmental risks which jeopardize the safety of people and the marketability of homes in the vicinity, they are known for emitting a constant loud hum. Personally, I would be even more turned off by the idea of having to listen to that noise pollution from my yard than I would by the relatively low risk of a toxic fire, but there are plenty of others who are very concerned about the fire risk. Either way, the Hathaways say, understandably, that they will abandon their plans to build new homes on their property if Lightshift Corporation is successful in its endeavor to locate a BESS on Panton Road, because the value of their new homes will not be worth the cost of building them. I consider that to be a huge missed opportunity for Vergennes.

Please do not buy into the narrative that those of us who oppose BESS on Panton Road are "anti clean energy" because that is certainly not true about me, and please don't assume this a political issue. For me, it is about priorities and opportunities. We cannot, in this instance, support both the BESS on Panton Road and the addition of desperately needed new homes in our community. Battery energy storage systems should not be located in residential areas. It is unfair to the people who already live nearby and it is bad business when they devalue existing homes and jeopardize the creation of new homes.

~ Amy Bodette Barr