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May 13, 2019

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

RE: Case No. 19-0855-RULE, Proposed revisions to Vermont Public Utility Commission Rule 5.100

Dear Commissioners:

The Southern Windsor County Regional Planning Commission (SWCRPC) is providing these written comments regarding the proposed revisions to Vermont Public Utility Commission Rule 5.100. We are 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 we believe is very beneficial.

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. The SWCRPC does not support that change for the following reasons:

1. Enhanced energy plans are valuable, but most of those plans in this region do not identify specific preferred sites. Municipal enhanced energy plans are not currently ready to replace the function of the preferred site letter.
2. Enhanced energy plans are complicated, and take a long period of time for some municipalities to prepare and adopt. Many municipalities have not yet adopted enhanced energy plans, and some may chose not to. This proposed Rule change could negatively impact those municipalities since they would be unable to designate preferred sites in their community.
3. It would be impossible for an enhanced energy plan to foresee all good solar project sites. The preferred site letter provides a complementary process to consider proposed solar project sites without needing to update and amend plans.
4. We 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. We believe this early coordination has ultimately resulted in better projects.

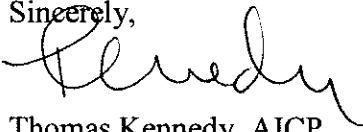
For these reasons, we respectfully request that the PUC keep the ability to designate preferred sites via a letter from the legislative body, local planning commission and regional planning commission.

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~~ 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. Please feel free to contact me or Jason Rasmussen with questions regarding these comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "TKennedy", written over the word "Sincerely,".

Thomas Kennedy, AICP
Executive Director