

From: [REDACTED]
To: [SitingBoard Filing \(DPU\)](#)
Subject: Need for Stronger Community Engagement in Clean Energy Projects
Date: Tuesday, April 22, 2025 12:20:07 PM

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To the Energy Facilities Siting Board (EFSB),

As a resident of Shutesbury, a rural, heavily forested town in Western Massachusetts, I am writing to express my deep concern regarding the current proposals for pre-filing consultation and engagement in clean energy infrastructure projects. I believe the proposed two-phase approach does not adequately address the critical need for early and broad community input, and I strongly urge the EFSB to implement a more robust and transparent process.

Our town, like many others in the Commonwealth, is deeply invested in environmental stewardship. We value our forests, our water resources, and our rural character. However, we have recently experienced the challenges of navigating large-scale energy development projects with developers who have often prioritized expediency over genuine community engagement. This experience has made it clear that without clear, enforceable regulations, developers are likely to proceed with their plans without considering the unique characteristics and concerns of our communities.

I am particularly concerned that the current proposal prioritizes targeted outreach to “key stakeholders” in Phase 1 and only opens up engagement to the broader public later in Phase 2. This approach is backwards. The broader public, especially in rural areas, will be significantly impacted by these projects and their local knowledge is critical. We need a more efficient approach where broad engagement occurs at the very beginning, allowing for more substantial input and potential modifications to projects before significant plans are solidified. Limiting engagement early on risks overlooking important community concerns and perpetuating an “us versus them” dynamic. It has happened already and our town is mired in a costly lawsuit that could have been avoided.

Therefore, I strongly urge the EFSB to consider the following recommendations:

1. **Require Public Hearings Early and Locally:** Mandate a public hearing within or near the municipality where the project will be sited at the earliest stages of planning. This allows for in-person participation and ensures EFSB representatives understand the local context.
2. **Broaden Outreach in Phase 1:** Require physical mailings and other outreach methods to the entire community, not just abutters or key stakeholders. Email alone is insufficient; physical mailings are essential for reaching everyone in rural areas with limited internet access or who are overwhelmed with digital communication.

3. **Specify Municipal Involvement:** Explicitly name committees like Conservation Commissions, Planning Boards, and Boards of Health as entities that must be engaged in Phase 1. General terms like “elected or appointed officials” are insufficient; these specific bodies possess crucial local knowledge.
4. **Require Public Advertising:** Mandate public advertisement of proposed projects early in the planning phase, including physical flyers in public locations, local radio announcements, and social media channels. Such advertisement should have clear guidance on branding and language from the EFSB to avoid it being disregarded as junk communication.
5. **Require Community Benefit Agreements:** Ensure that every project proponent is required to discuss community benefit agreements with municipal representatives. These agreements should be flexible and allow communities to benefit in ways they identify, addressing local impacts such as road damage, public safety needs, and supporting local clean energy initiatives.
6. **Implement Third-Party Note-Takers and Meeting Recordings:** To ensure transparency and accountability, have the EFSB select a third-party notetaker for meetings at the applicant’s expense, with notes directly submitted to EFSB. Also require hybrid public meetings to be recorded and submitted as documentation.

The EFSB has an opportunity to create a transparent and inclusive process that empowers communities and ensures clean energy projects are developed responsibly and with local input. I urge you to prioritize early, broad, and meaningful community engagement in your regulations. Our rural communities depend on it.

Sincerely,

Gayle Huntress

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