

May 29, 2020

Sent via Email: DOER.SMART@mass.gov

To: Department of Energy Resources
ATTN: Kaitlin Kelly
100 Cambridge Street
Suite 1020
Boston, MA 02114

RE: SMART Public Comment

To Commissioner Patrick Woodcock:

We are John and Judy Simpson, and we are residents of Rochester, Massachusetts. Approximately two years ago, we entered into a lease agreement to develop a solar system on our property as we were nearing retirement and looking for ways to use our land in a eco friendly manner. We have sporadically logged the property over many decades, but were looking for something that could provide more consistent cash flows.

We considered several different options such as cell towers, pasture, animals and housing developments, but ultimately decided on solar. Solar was going to provide us long term, reliable retirement income; allow us to live more comfortably, and keeps the property in our family.

We would like to express to you with the deepest sincerity that our experience throughout this process has been frustrating and disappointing, to say the least. It is hard to express, into words, the length of regulatory hurdles that had to be overcome. Our project faced massive interconnection delays and a lengthy permitting process that has been exceedingly difficult.

The Rochester Conservation Commission is thorough and strict, and negotiations with Natural Heritage have been slow going. Throughout this process we were forced to reduce our system size dramatically to provide permanent conservation for the eastern box turtle that is on part of our property. With permitting finally moving forward and a Group Study announced, we were finally seeing the end of the tunnel when the DOER Emergency Ruling essentially killed our dream.

By all accounts it appears to be clear that this ruling appears to simply prevent solar in Massachusetts. Respectfully stated: it simply makes no sense. The ruling does not seem to consider that there are current regulatory commissions that are performing the required protection that the emergency rulings seems to address. It seems to be a regulation on top of a regulation, and there are currently other methods of development that have no such regulation and much more destructive. By example, a housing development would permanently change the landscape.

Here and in 35 years from now, this solar system is scheduled to be decommissioned and removed, and then nature will fill-in the rest and the trees will grow back. We suggest that a housing development or other types of development do not have this kind of rebound rate, if any.

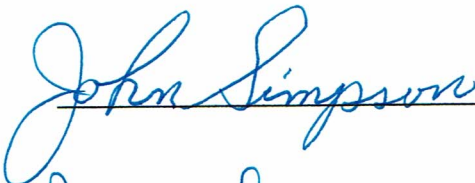

We have waited years to see this solar system become reality: long enough that we are now entering retirement and were anxiously awaiting the moment when the system was finished. Now and as a landowner and resident of a rural area, we do not understand how or why the DOER would take away our rights to develop our land?

We have complied with all efforts to ensure that construction would commence in a responsibly manner, but now, we feel that we are being punished. And, it's not just us but we feel our town is being punished also because this solar system would provide much needed tax revenue for Rochester.

In the cruelest of irony, we were actually establishing a large area into permanent conservation, helping the very turtles that need protection. Again, the ruling seems to make no sense to our long planned and almost completed project.

We are kindly put firmly stating our opinion, to you, that the DOER needs to strike the Priority Habitat provisions from the rules, and let the DEP and Conservation Commissions exercise their jurisdictional power and prudent judgment. There is no need for this unfair provision when there are already departments and town bylaws ensuring the protection of endangered species and habitats.

Sincerely,


_____,


John and Judy Simpson
102 Quaker Lane
Rochester, Massachusetts, 02770