

SMART program comments

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To: SMART, DOER (ENE) <doer.smart@mass.gov>

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Dear People,

I think the new SMART guidelines are great! I understand why government typically turns to industry for initial advice about promoting a particular business -- whether it's guidelines about ocean fishing, casinos, manufacturing, tourism or solar arrays. But the first pass on these solar promotional regulations was really heavily balanced to the full wish-list from the solar industry. So it's long overdue that the environmental and consumer perspectives should also be included in the new regs. And this has been very carefully achieved in the new SMART program.

We live in a small, rural community in the far western part of Massachusetts -- Lanesboro, which borders NY state on the west. Communities like ours have been targeted by solar companies as "low-hanging fruit" compared to larger towns in Eastern Mass. And that's a good description -- we have small, volunteer committees for town planning, zoning, health and environment. These are very easily overwhelmed by big companies. So we do need some protection in the laws themselves to strike a more reasonable balance with industrial electrical generation companies.

I think most people are in favor in solar -- but they don't want to look at it first-hand at the border of their back yards. People live in small towns to enjoy the scenery, the wildlife, the fresh air and quiet. They believe (for good reason) that there are plenty of locations for large solar arrays which will not destroy the above. In our town we have a new array going up in the back-nine of a small golf course -- a location high up on a hill where no one will be able to see these panels from any other location. We have a failed mall which offers a large expanse of rooftops and empty parking lots which would be perfect for a solar array. We have landfills which are not visible to residents.

And we also have lovely farms with long-distance vistas that are enjoyed by locals and visitors alike. We have supported our farmers for many years with generous tax breaks to help them stay in business. We've done this because we wanted to see real cows -- not "cash cows" like industrial solar arrays. This is prime farmland -- as evaluated and defined by the state, showing up on state ecology maps. We've paid farmers to protect and preserve this land -- not to destroy it.

We also have long-time and new home-owners who have invested in home locations which take advantage of these spectacular views. They are justifiably angry that this prime farmland and wonderful scenery can be destroyed by huge solar arrays.

I also see in the state's plans that extensive investment, study and work has been put into the design of the SMART program. Yes -- it has been designed to eliminate some "possible" solar sites for very good reasons. Yes -- a few farmers will be upset that they can't replace their cows with a new cash cow solar field. But many more residents will be upset if solar arrays are sited in places where no one wants to see them.

Another very significant factor is that these solar arrays do absolutely nothing for our communities in exchange for the damage they do. The solar companies have been able to eliminate their "payment-in-lieu-of-taxes" agreements with towns across the state. So the town loses both tax revenue and PILOT income. We have no incentive to site solar arrays in places objectionable to our residents.

In short, place these industrial electric generation facilities in locations which are otherwise unsuitable for other uses. Don't destroy our vistas, wildlife habitats and prime farmland when there are many other siting alternatives.

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