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To: DOER.SMART@mass.gov
cc: Senator Jo Comerford joanne.Comerford@masenate.gov
Representative Aaron Saunders aaron.saunders@mahouse.gov
From: Judith Eisman
Re: Proposed regulations on Solar development
Date: July 24, 2025

While it is clear that great effort has gone into creating these complicated regulations, I believe that some solutions and formulas have been brought forward that will not sufficiently protect our natural resources. Finding ways to use less energy has not been valued enough to make it a priority or even included in these regulations. No adequate plans been made for removing “renewable energy” components and disposing of them safely at the end of their usefulness. I offer these thoughts:

1. ***Increasing the amount of “renewable energy” is not necessarily a laudable goal when it must of necessity involve massive use of fossil fuels*** to mine the resource materials (after making and powering the machinery to do the mining), construct the solar units, transport and install them, and install them where they may be subject to fire, decomposition into water supplies and soils, and harm forests, habitat, productive farmland, and other natural resources.

The policy goal, as I understand it, seeks to protect forest interests and values that most rural communities are already protecting through historical circumstances, zoning, local wetlands bylaws, or other means. *It is an error to contemplate, let alone transform any of our remaining forests into industrialized zones.* Energy Storage Systems in forested rural towns will be disasters waiting to happen when fire hits during dry conditions and where volunteers will be hard pressed to notify residents or contend with a coming threat. We have already changed nature by damaging wetlands, forests, habitats, and fisheries out of greed and ignorance. We know better now, so let’s act and regulate accordingly.

2. ***Better incentives are needed to encourage solar placement in the already built environment and energy use - no matter how it is generated - must be reduced.*** Allowing destruction of forest connectivity and further damaging habitat, water supply, heat reduction, and other forest values, makes no sense. Can’t we figure out how to incentivize good placement and reduce use, rather than encourage state policy that promotes waste and growth by industrializing open land and promoting energy-devouring data centers. [Also see the Boston Globe story: <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2024/11/20/business/data-center-western-mass/?p1=Article Inline Related Box> and Senator Markey’s comments.] These AI facilities increase pressure on the state’s energy and water resources at the very time when we should be looking more carefully at how the energy we already have available is being used. That will have negative impacts on WMass water resources.

3. ***Public private partnerships calling for limits to local government control amount to further steps toward authoritarianism; they undermine citizen input.*** Closing loopholes for Public Entity Status (28.07:5 C-4) makes sense as does promoting local communities' ability to permit projects that are appropriate to their circumstances and needs to assist in solving climate problems. The current system may be cumbersome, but haste and one-size-fits-all solutions have pitfalls, too, when decisions are made without informed local input.

Part of the job of local people and officials who are concerned about the health, welfare and safety of their citizens is to thwart those who want to convert land and resources into a commodity. Help them do their job with regulations that protect forests and farms. Do NOT allow a "mitigation" fee for solar that is deemed harmful anywhere! How can that possibly protect our resources in either the long or short term? Too much destruction is allowed for solar installation in forested land in these regulations. Critical natural landscape areas in BioMap areas must be off limits for solar projects not attached to a nearby residence or business.

4. ***Simple but enhanced efforts to create community resolve and action are needed.*** Think in terms of thwarting an enemy: We are in a battle to save ourselves and the planet, so look to history for ways to engage the public rather than assist those who are capitalizing on the notion of more rather than those who advocate for using less but using it more wisely.*

Turn out some lights and turn off unused and unneeded appliances until you are actually using them. Walk more; drive less, and share the ride. Review and understand the need for Dark Skies, quiet spaces, and peaceful surroundings. These and many other community oriented actions can be promoted along with the goals of making towns and cities more livable and community oriented.

5. ***We have decided by default or intention to keep open land cheap to allow developers to make a profit.*** I quote from a friend discussing reports from MassAudubon and Harvard Forest and others: "The facts are quite clear both about the limitations of solar and the importance of biodiversity and carbon sequestration and cooling impacts of large scale forests." Check those formulas again to ensure it's not all about money and the (excess?) profits to be reaped.

In sum, I believe the constant pressure to increase "renewable energy" is based upon a faulty assumption that stands to enrich corporations at the expense of forests, farmland, and resources that have already been depleted. The "need" for more renewable energy is based upon short term thinking when in fact we have not been addressing the long term need to limit expansion into undeveloped areas and regulate for the public welfare rather than for those with dreams of more wealth and power and have yet to consider the impacts of AI or how to regulate it appropriately before preparing the way for its arrival.

Thank you for your attention.

* Please note that I agree generally with comments made by Michael DeChiara on the topics of: Energy storage adder; recognizing Critical Natural Landscape as BioMap and therefore ineligible land; removing productive agricultural land from dual use eligibility (do you really want good soils needed for food production to be contaminated?)