

September 18, 2012

The Honorable Peter Shumlin
Governor, State of Vermont
109 State Street, Pavilion
Montpelier, VT 05609

Dear Governor Shumlin:

We represent a coalition of Vermonters with a range of opinions and are concerned that debate on wind energy has unnecessarily divided Vermont friends, families and communities.

We know that global climate change is a serious and growing threat, with potentially catastrophic environmental consequences, and greatly appreciate your strong national leadership on this issue. The lack of a clear policy in wind facility siting, however, has led to a piecemeal process that creates uncertainty, unnecessary conflict, and may not always be in the best long-term interests of Vermont.

We accept Vermont's responsibility to reduce its reliance on carbon-based fuels. Wind is and will be a part of Vermont's renewable energy portfolio and landscape. However, our support for wind energy is dependent upon appropriate siting, scale, design, and cumulative impact. Wind projects that vary widely in scale and design have already been approved in Vermont, and we need to evaluate and learn from these projects.

Unfortunately, the facts regarding wind energy are in dispute. Vermonters need to better understand the benefits and financial costs associated with utility scale wind energy generation and the potential risks to public health. Also current tax policy, which allots all the financial benefits of large wind sites only to the "receiving" town, and not to other affected towns should be reviewed and evaluated. Unbiased, factual information is urgently needed. While those issues are better considered in an objective manner by appropriate authorities in those fields, we urge that progress on addressing these issues be made concurrently with our proposal below.

Our particular concern is that the process for siting wind power facilities, especially on Vermont's ecologically fragile mountaintops, now lacks both long-term vision and consistency. Mountaintops are where the wind blows most reliably, but such places are also characterized by the state's most sensitive terrain and, many believe them to be a critical part of our aesthetic heritage and identity as a state. Large-scale development of these areas should only occur after careful thought and consideration of all the consequences.

We believe the siting debate over wind energy raises fundamental questions: What is the right process for deciding appropriate sites for wind towers, and what policies can Vermont enact to proactively guide the development of wind energy?

When faced with similarly challenging and divisive issues, Vermont leaders have often established a high level commission to sort out a path forward. In the aftermath of the 1927 flood, Governor Weeks established The Commission on Country Life, which produced a book-length report entitled *Rural Vermont: A Program for the Future*. The "Little Hoover Commission" was led by Deane Davis and produced a plan to reorganize and modernize Vermont's state government. Governor Davis later established the "Gibb Commission" to look at land use issues. We recommend the immediate formation of such a commission to explore issues associated with large-scale wind energy generation. The work of such a commission should:

- Provide a mapped inventory of potential wind energy development locations, in addition to important natural and cultural resources that should be protected from adverse impacts associated with large-scale wind energy development. This inventory should build-off of the resource mapping initiative of the Agency of Natural Resources called for in S.214 (Act 170), enacted this year, and include:
 - conserved lands (including a clear understanding of the purposes for which they were originally conserved, and their current ecological and aesthetic function);
 - sensitive environmental resources, such as rare and endangered natural communities, significant wildlife habitat (large habitat blocks and linkages between large habitat blocks), fragile resources (e.g., headwater streams, wetlands), and other important features; and
 - significant cultural resources (e.g., landscapes of exceptional scenic, historic, recreational or economic value).
- Consider the cumulative impacts of developing multiple sites within a specific region and statewide, including a projected "build-out" (i.e., identification of the maximum number of facilities required to meet the state's renewable energy goals).
- Review the existing policies and standards for evaluating and permitting wind power facilities, including the standards applied by the Public Service Board, especially with regard to mountaintop and ridgetop sites, and explore whether the current process properly considers the cumulative impact of multiple wind generation sites in a region.
- Include an assessment of the environmental impacts of approved wind facilities, and set forth a consistent protocol for monitoring the impacts of future projects and remediating adverse impacts should they occur.
- Provide ample opportunity for public involvement on both the local and regional level.

This process should be fair, independent and broadly representative, and undertaken and completed as soon as possible. Ultimately, it should result in a technical report of all findings and policy recommendations, and a non-technical report written in a manner for general distribution and public education.

We believe this would benefit all Vermonters, the Vermont countryside we value, and our energy future. Greater informed understanding of the pros and cons of large-scale wind projects can bring Vermonters together on this difficult topic.

Sincerely,

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