



OFFICE OF
PLANNING BOARD

Town Of Belchertown

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Senator Michael J. Barrett
Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities and Energy
Massachusetts State House, Room 109-D
Boston, MA 02133

Representative Jeffrey N. Roy
Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities and Energy
Massachusetts State House Room 473B
Boston, MA 02133

Support for Senate/House bill S 2596

Dear Chair Barrett and Chair Roy,

The Belchertown Planning Department fully supports S 2569. The single sentence proposed to be added to MGL ch 40A §3 will be a great positive change for locally-supported clean energy generation in that it will add clarity to permitting, and it will restore public support for clean energy development. Belchertown has always been a strong advocate of solar energy. We were one of the first Green Communities and our original commercial solar bylaw included more incentives than restrictions. We are also the source of five municipal watersheds, including that of Greater Boston, and we take the protection of our natural resources very seriously. Thus, we have some meaningful insight in how commercial solar development has fared so far at the municipal level and have constructive recommendations for improvement.

In anticipation of the SMART program, in late 2017 commercial solar installers began approaching town officials to discuss their intentions of developing some sites. These meetings were positive as the projects were presented by apparently earnest young people who believed they were in the vanguard of doing good things for the planet's future. Once the applications came in, we learned that these companies are frequently just opportunistic financial interests seeking to take advantage of tax credits, various financing mechanisms, and laws that promote such development over local control. These projects were investments for financial gain and the investors were not necessarily interested in the planet's health.

The disregard for ecological health was most manifest through many of the sites chosen by the developers. While site selection is a combination of many factors, including the willingness of landowners, the combination of the SMART program's initial incentives and the uncertain strength of local control over permitting resulted in more ecological damage than good on some of the projects that were built.

Belchertown remains committed to furthering the growth of solar energy generation. We understand we must do our part for the sakes of everyone's future, and we recognize that some concessions are to be made for the greater good. We hope our experience and support will assist in adopting this measure of assured local permitting ability so we can develop good solar projects that both make money for investors and save the planet.

We want solar energy development to be as clean in implementation as it is in promise. Local boards are the people directly involved in directing and reviewing the siting and scale of these projects. We sincerely hope our political leaders agree with us in the importance of reasonable land use laws enacted and implemented at the municipal level.

Sincerely,



Douglas Albertson
Town Planner