

My name is Darcy Sweeney and I live in Florence. I'm speaking today on behalf of Climate Action Now, Western Massachusetts. Climate Action Now strongly recommends that the TUE committee report S.2596 and HD.4607 out of committee with a favorable recommendation.

These two bills would update current law regarding municipalities' ability to regulate industrial-scale solar installations, giving towns and cities the right to reasonably regulate non-residential solar when necessary to protect public health, safety, welfare, and/or to preserve forested lands, agricultural lands, and wetlands.

Current law, passed in the 1980's, aimed to restrict impediments to people's installation of solar on their homes. That situation has changed dramatically in recent decades with more and more solar corporations – frequently from outside the Commonwealth or even the country – installing large-scale solar projects on a town's forests, wetlands, or farmlands.

If a municipality is concerned about protecting a town forest or watershed and tries to invoke a by-law intended to regulate destructive large-scale solar projects, it has to fear that it will face a lawsuit from the solar company based on this outdated law, MGL 40A, section 3 and in fact, this is already happening.

Certainly, the Commonwealth must incentivize both solar and other forms of renewable energy, but there are ways to do this that do not include destruction of forests and farms. Forests and soils are our first line of defense in sequestering atmospheric carbon; they have been drawing down and storing carbon for millennia with an efficiency that is far beyond any human technology.

And the science is clear that even if we stopped all fossil fuel emissions tomorrow by switching to renewable forms of energy, we would still face massive climate disruption due to the carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases that are already in the atmosphere and will remain there for decades to come. Therefore, we must preserve our forests, wetlands, and farmlands even as we move to renewable forms of energy, such as solar, as rapidly as possible.

It makes no sense to cut down our forests or destroy our farmland that stabilize the climate, purify our water, prevent flooding, maintain biodiversity, provide food, and give beauty – all for large-scale, industrial solar installations that can be located elsewhere. Instead, the Commonwealth must incentivize developers to place their large-scale solar arrays on lands that have already been degraded such as capped landfills and parking lots, median strips and sides of highways, or on rooftops.

Please vote to allow municipalities to protect their lands and forests by favorably reporting S.2596 and HD. 4607 out of committee. Thank you.