

# Western Massachusetts Solar Forum Part II

## Attendee Feedback from Post-Forum Survey

### What is helpful about the Commission on Energy Infrastructure Siting and Permitting Commission recommendations?

To better understand the different legislative vehicles to put the recommendations into action.

A clear path forward for siting and permitting

Stress on the need to do more NOW. It is just that we cannot do away with forests for short-term goals (2050 is short term in the scheme of things)

nothing new that I heard

Not very

That the Commission agreed that the current system is inefficient and needs to be reformed and supported with staff and expertise.

While the process between proposed legislation and accelerated permitting for projects remain unclear, discussion around the topic was informative.

Ideas of providing model bylaws and training materials. Examples from towns that have gone through the permitting process include what worked and what didn't. How the bylaws will be integrated into the town's comprehensive planning documents. Small towns planning boards are volunteers. They attend one or two meetings a month and already have full agendas at those meetings, and there is limited staff support to even consider progressive zoning like open space residential design, which is a critical component in saving land from being consumed with one house on two to four acres of land. The residents will not accept the state taking away their local control. What are the plans to address this?

Clearly the commission recognizes the need to provide small, rural communities more guidance and more funding

It's helpful to know where the Commonwealth stands on giving local communities the power to regulate within their borders.

Knowing somebody is working on the issue

Candor when candor was forthcoming.

They are not helpful because the criteria seem obvious.

Presentation by TUE chairs and would be helpful to repeat when/if final legislation is passed

Taking away some of the control by 351 individual Planning Bds. over the possibility of a livable and equitable future.

They did a good job assessing the overall renewable energy status in MA and calling for the need for standards. They specifically said that facilities < 25 MW should be locally permitted. I think they could have done better in taking the long view, but they were following their mandate to focus on siting.

## **What is concerning about the Commission on Energy Infrastructure Siting and Permitting Commission recommendations?**

Lack of clarity on mitigation and community benefits agreements

The utilities still play an enormous role and have so much control over every aspect of the energy transition.

I have shared my analysis with Mindy, Jo and Rep. Roy. Hopefully those concerns were reviewed

What is concerning is what is not being said

One size fits all approach just will not work well in Western Mass. The further you get from Boston, the less grasp on reality seems to exist, at least with the policies and practices.

The less than <25 MW solar projects remain under local control and it remains unclear what a consolidated permit process might look like and how vested municipalities are to allowing reasonable siting of solar projects.

"There is a lack of balance in viewpoints, a Lack of Berkshire input, and a lack of understanding that PB members are elected. Unless the voters agree with their position, which may not be as progressive as your panelists make it out to be, you will not get buy-in!!!! And how do you provide training to PB members when the percentage that attend training/education sessions is not robust.

Many commercial farmers don't feel AFT represents their viewpoints."

changes are needed, and will take time to implement; the impacts of climate change are increasing and we need to do a better job of permitting solar projects

See above answer--the Commission seems more interested in what for-profit entities can build quickly to reach the 2050 climate goals. For-profit entities are what brought us to the climate disaster in the first place.

I do not concur that the state commission be allowed to ram through decisions overriding local control of Solar Development. Our town wants more control over solar power generated in our community through Municipal Lighting Plant legislation and micro-grids. We will not be dictated to by the Utility companies, venture capitalists and the State Commission.

It is concerning that the state seems prepared to take the lead over local control.

Industrial level solar farms and the burden on local ecology, business, tourist industry, etc. will all be placed in rural areas and the power sent to Boston

Small towns under 2000 not well represented

They will not be exercising authority over most large scale solar projects as almost are rated at 25+ MW

Our concern is the role of DPU seems to be favoring the utilities

1. The TUE-crafted legislation, HR4501 ignored the recommendation that facilities < 25 MW be locally permitted. 2. Not enough emphasis on modernizing the grid - That should come first in priority. 3. Not enough emphasis on prioritizing the built environment.

## **What else is needed to help you to effectively participate in solar decision-making?**

examples of successes and failures of siting and permitting

More materials are needed to be shared with towns and cities for people to become more educated about all aspects of this needed transition.

laws that allow for meaningful community and municipal participation, esp. retaining muni permitting

Sunlight

Structure, regulations, guidelines, clear explanations of legal requirements and process, technical assistance including funding. If this effort is not codified by the regulatory rule-making process, then not much will change. The regulations should not be written by the utilities and special interests.

Quick publication of the straw proposal of SMART 3.0.

Legislation written that balances the entire state,

more public information campaigns to help the public understand actions needed now

Information

We need to see research and funding for MLPs and micro grids we need alternative sources of funding for transformers and local grid conductor upgrades and we need to keep the public utilities from using current law to suppress local solar development in favor of utility company control. We understand that the venture capitalists and the utilities see a gold mine here moving everybody to heat pumps.

We need technical assistance to apply for grants and get funding for local solar projects.

All the options and their pros and cons.

Solar and wind assessment for small towns as had been done for a few towns by UMass Amherst

Technical assistance to help us upgrade our lines to 3 phase where appropriate.

1. legislation granting local communities the permitting power for solar arrays less than a specific size, such as 10 Megawatt. 2. legislation cancelling solar array inclusion in MGL Chap. 40A, section

3 - totally outdated. 3. Require site visit by at least one bona fide member of the state's permit granting authority, before permit is granted. It's too easy for applicants to gloss over a site's challenges.

## **What else is needed to address solar land-use conflicts?**

robust site suitability

Putting emphasis on the value of natural lands for the future of life on Earth is needed.

As Catherine Ratte said, for state standards to be established they need to be developed in conjunction with munis so that they are effectively endorsed by the time they are finalized. There is much work to do to get there

Knowledge and respect for the value of forests & trees

A statewide plan similar to the Full Build-out Analysis done by the Patrick Administration about 20+ years ago, but laying out the town-by-town plan for energy siting and solar development, so that everyone can see what the impacts are ahead of time, and what the cumulative impacts will be from full build-out of the proposed infrastructure needed to meet the goals of the CECP.

Funding to provide technical assistance to municipalities and then legislation.

All of the above!!!! With special emphasis on the truly rural areas.

Guidance from the AGs office on how to write zoning by-laws; clear statements that not all of our solar can be placed on already built areas

information for local community leaders, legislators who will give their constituents a voice

Legislation to allow towns to do distributive generation and control as opposed to large corporate installations in small towns that are at the expense of and do not in any way benefit or serve the host towns.

We need all those items but our projects conflicts can easily be resolved on site.

Community owned solar for many owners and renters who cannot install on their property

Scientific reviews and assessments of

More 3 phase where needed so we can add solar arrays.

Action. Action. Action. Action. The threats of climate change are existential. All our efforts to address these other issues will be wasted, if we are spending all our money responding to climate catastrophes, insuring against them, and fighting wars to protect ourselves from the global unrest and competition over food, water, and other threatened resources. These discussions make me feel hopeless for our future.

1. Research support for safer large battery storage, to eliminate the dangers of lithium-ion battery thermal runaways - poisoning water supplies from toxic releases during overheating is a serious concern at present. 2. Concerted drive to install solar in the built environment, especially over

large parking lots. 3. Upgrade the grid, so land-use decisions are not based solely on access to 3-phase transmission lines. Serious attention must be given to how the grid upgrade is funded and who makes the decisions.

## **What else is needed to promote equity & community benefits from solar?**

strong staffing at regional and state scale to help communities learn how to do engagement

Financial and technical assistance for volunteer boards in small towns is imperative.

Respect for Home Rule

Yes, to funding, TA, regulations, and community support. Without this, no progress will be possible.

Funding for public education to explain the challenges and cost to electrify the building, transportation and renewable generation sectors. A visual image: Most residential streets have 25kW transformers hanging from a pole servicing 5-10 houses. That single transformer will service 3 EV's. Every feeder, transformer and substation will need to be upgraded to provide for electrification.

Legislation that is more balanced than what is being considered. Create a massive lobbying effort in less than 60 days to amend the draft legislation. Groups of people need to be at the state house every day requesting the issues that have been overlooked be included in the legislation. Post card, letter writing campaign. Get the media involved.

Guidance on community benefits agreements (best policies) and understanding of how community benefits agreements are enforced (could the state help?)

information for local community leaders, legislators who will give their constituents a voice

Getting the general public more concerned on the issue

Development of legislation that supports micro-grids and distributive local generation under Municipal Lighting Plant Legislation

Solar and wind assessments, regional sustainability person(s)

1. legislation defining rural environmental justice communities. Rural communities are the most impacted by climate change (drought, flood). 2. Include in HR4501 the statement that local communities have full right to protect their water supplies - including watershed for public reservoirs and private wells. 3. Establish funding & technical assistance for solar arrays over large parking lots: a win-win for land use benefits, but expensive -- developers & parking lot owners need a big push to get going!

## **What would help you have more technical expertise to develop a community benefits agreement?**

Well-informed expert who has the well-being of our small town at heart

Absolutely, especially at first.

Jon Abe gave the right answer for a CBA; another speaker in the plenary mentioned that the benefits of solar, including economic multiplier are sufficient community benefits. Some boards will use the CBA concept as a permitted use extortion tool. Where in the DOER economic study completed by SEA it there a line item for CBA cost?

Models. Free mediation services. RPA funding is to provide legal, technical, and support staff to communities, with the largest percentage going to towns without municipal planning staff.

Guidance/examples of good/working agreements

We are more interested in community control than community benefits.

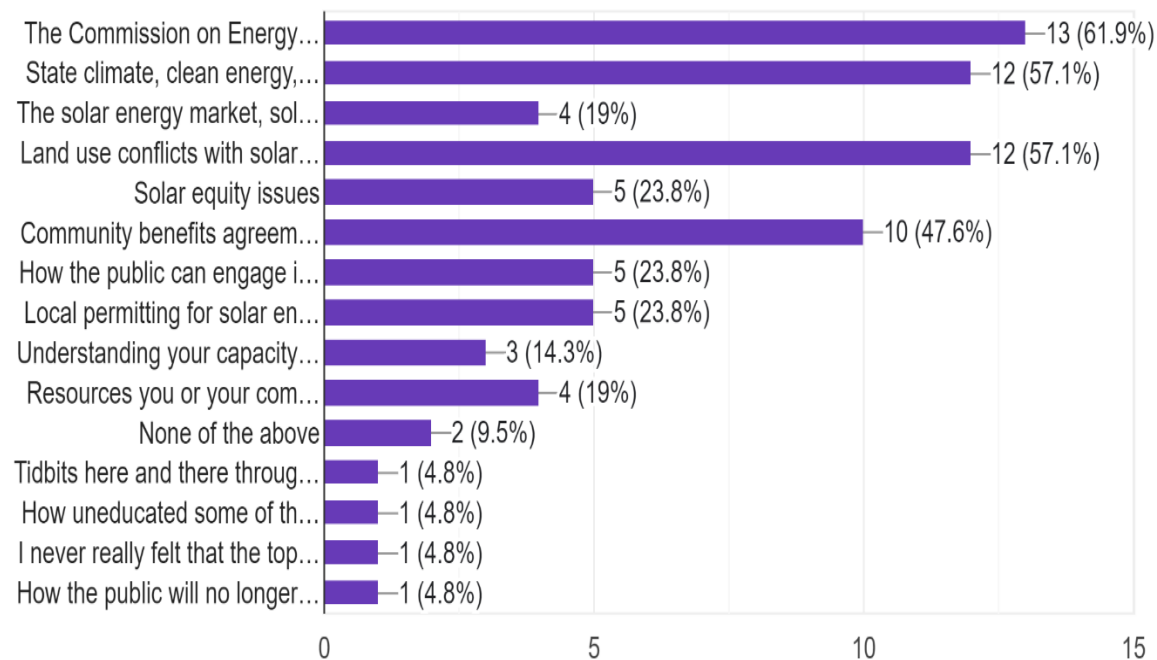
Both projects will provide lower power costs to lower cost power to the Town and the subscribers.

CBA guidance

We are a small community with just volunteers. We do need help from experienced solar folks.

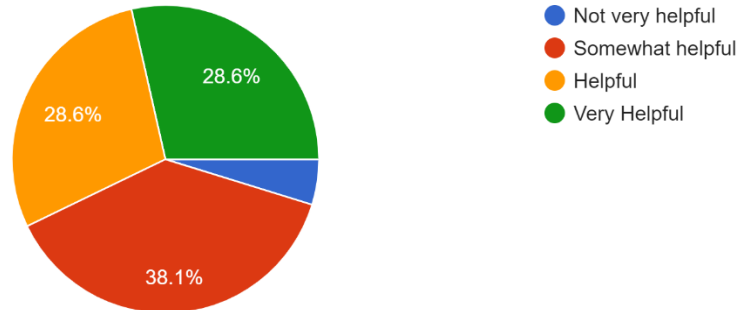
Provide more funding for the Regional Planning Commissions to be a source of expertise and advice to local communities

### What topics do you feel you have become more knowledgeable about as a result of this Forum?



## Helpfulness of Forum

How helpful was the Forum in understanding Commission recommendations & participating in solar decision-making in your community?



### Additional comments - in particular, what would have made the Forum more helpful?

I served on the Commission and have been doing renewables work for almost 20 years, so I didn't have much to check off on the boxes above regarding take-aways.

Additional resources for my community

Since H4501 is an actual bill there should have been much more attention to that as compared to the Commission's recommendations which, in and of themselves, cannot become law. They are informative and may guide legislation but H4501 is the only legislative vehicle we are looking at now and it deserves more attention. In my opinion it is more concerning that the Commission's recommendations

An open chat would have extended participant's input

more prepared info and some links to developed policies and guidelines.

Undersecretary Judge presentation

Include the Berkshires. What happened to BRPC????? They submitted comments on the proposed legislation. Are you going to repeat today's forum for them?

Shift the panels on Balancing the Tradeoffs earlier in the forum

Having questions answered immediately. There wasn't really a discussion although I don't know how that can happen in such a context--but there were a lot of unanswered questions.

"While I understand the position of the Commission of energy infrastructure and permitting

As a participating local solar decision-maker I am not in full or even partial agreement with the power of the Commission to override local control!

more examples of how communities can develop their own solar infrastructure!

What happens to old solar farms when they are no longer used?

Participation from Berkshire legislators and town planning boards & energy committees

The obstructive Role of DPU with the utilities.

Needed some direct discussion of the impact of HR4501, taking away all local control for permitting. "Expedited permitting" and "Consolidated control" are complete contradictions. In my experience it's lack of careful advance planning by developers that causes delays, not the permitting process per se. (such as how they plan for stormwater management, erosion control)

## **Specific feedback about the Forum**

Looking forward to Forum #3

It was well organized and good content. I left much less frustrated that from the Part 1 series. This was because it was more reality based - recognizing what is going on at the community level

The format was not the best, as it severely limited public participation and engagement, which is sort of ironic, considering we were talking about how to increase public engagement. Disabling the chat was really not beneficial. That is often where the best comments are provided, since the public can speak freely. So, the way the "forum" was so crippled made it very unfriendly and impersonal. Too bad, but I guess it was more important to maintain total control, or the appearance of control.

By the end of the day, I was pleased that there was a balanced discussion about solar development and not just folks using environmental concerns as a NIMBY issue.

Since many PB members work during the day, why was this not offered at night so more people who are being impacted could participate? I would have liked to hear the concerns of commercial farmers, business owners from our region, large energy users, real estate professionals, etc. The lawyer who closed the program certainly was biased, and she didn't leave time for a rebuttal.

Great job!! Thanks to all involved.

Overall a good job of presenting the Commission's recommendations and offering other perspectives. I just wish there had been more opportunity to get answers to specific questions, especially about the bills stemming from the recommendations that are still being debated.

What it's worth I have put you in the Solar links section of my website. [Johnhowardsolar.org](http://Johnhowardsolar.org)

the format of the afternoon session was less than ideal due to zoom limitations we need to revisit how that can be corrected

It is a shame that more people did not take part. I only listened to the afternoon portions because I have much work to do while the sun shines. Most all the commenters were from the valley, mostly Amherst. Not a diverse response. We in the Hilltowns need more input and representation!

Please make the questions sent in to panelists public. Many were not addressed by the panelists/facilitators.

Thanks for continuing to help in this important subject.



Excellent set of speakers. Wish Rep. Roy & Sen. Barrett could have participated all day. An invited speaker who specifically presented the advantages of local permitting would have been helpful to provide balance. Despite all the expertise presented by the speakers, I came away depressed that residents of areas outside of Boston and its suburbs will be effectively shut out of all decision-making.