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Subject: Governor Shumlin Signs Renewable Energy Siting Bill into Law

For Immediate Release

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Governor Shumlin Signs Renewable Energy Siting Bill into Law

Middlebury – Gov. Peter Shumlin has signed S. 260, a bill designed to improve regional and town energy planning and to enhance community input into the siting of energy projects.

The legislation was developed over a number of months, and was based in large part on the recommendations of the Solar Siting Task Force. It provides regional planning commissions and towns with “substantial deference” before the Public Service Board when their plans have been determined to be consistent with state energy and climate goals. Funding and training to support planning efforts will be available through the Regional Planning Commissions working in concert with the Department of Public Service and the Vermont League of Cities and towns. The new law requires planning across sectors to include electricity generation, electric and thermal efficiency, and transportation.

“This new law provides a roadmap for how we continue to transform our energy system in Vermont while improving opportunities for our communities to have a say in the process,” said Gov. Shumlin. “This comprehensive legislation brings to conclusion a sometimes challenging but necessary discussion about how to best plan for the locally-produced clean energy we need. I want to say thank you to Speaker Shap Smith and President Pro Tem John Campbell, all the legislators who worked on this bill, and in particular Senator Chris Bray who authored the legislation and Representative Tony Klein who shepherded it through the House.”

The Legislature passed S. 260 on June 9, 2016, after a previous version of energy siting legislation, S. 230, was vetoed by the Governor over concerns including unintended effects of new wind sound standards language.

“I am so pleased that the Legislature was able to address the concerns I raised, and get the language in this bill right,” said Gov. Shumlin. “Now we can foster strong community participation in planning for Vermont’s energy future, while also providing new wind energy sound standards that are rational and will not take an important renewable energy technology off the table at a time when Vermont is leading the nation in per capita clean energy jobs.”

Said Sen. Chris Bray, “This is a powerful tool for our state’s towns and regional planning commissions, and it’s a tool that will serve us well in the decades ahead as we continue to transform our generation and use of energy in Vermont.”

Said Rep. Tony Klein, "With the passage of S 260 very clear positive energy and land use policy will now be enacted. The Administration and the Legislature has now made good on a promise to scores of Vermont towns to give them a greater voice in the siting of local energy projects!"

Said Fran Putnam of the Weyeridge Energy Committee, "Some local communities have expressed concerns about the siting of renewable energy installations. This law strikes an appropriate balance between those concerns and the need to get 90 percent of Vermont's energy from renewable sources by 2050. The Weybridge Energy Committee can now work with our local Planning Commission to modify our town plan to take advantage of the provisions of this new law."

Said Adam Lougee, Executive Director, Addison County Regional Planning Commission, "Solar siting has been and remains a controversial topic in Addison County and Vermont. This bill, S260, stands as an important piece of legislation for Addison County, its municipalities and its citizens because it recognizes the importance of planning and citizen involvement. Government works most efficiently, thoughtfully and effectively when it is crafted by citizens that have an interest in the outcome. S260 recognizes Vermont's commitment to carbon free, locally generated renewable energy. As importantly, it recognizes the need to plan for how, and where, Vermont produces that energy. It provides resources to enable regional, municipal and local voices to craft those plans. Lastly, it changes regulatory standards to ensure that the regional and local planning voices it enables will receive the deference their work deserves. The Addison County Regional Planning Commission is happy to host the Governor's signing of this bill into law."

In addition to enhancing local and regional planning for renewables, providing municipalities and regions with more say in the permitting process, and establishing a two-step process for developing new wind energy sound standards, S. 260 has a number of other provisions including:

- Increasing the participation of the Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets in energy permitting decisions, giving more attention to agricultural soils in the permitting process, and ensuring that energy development on agricultural soils won't inadvertently make it easier for other types of future development to occur on those soils
- A one-year pilot within the Standard Offer program to site renewable energy projects in preferred locations such as parking lots, rooftops, brownfields, closed landfills, gravel pits, and town designated areas
- Development of rules to address ongoing maintenance of plantings for screening as well as the decommissioning of energy facilities at the end of their useful life
- Enhanced notice provisions to neighboring towns and regions when applications for new energy generation facilities are initiated
- A requirement that any new wind generation facility of four or more turbines minimize visual impact at nighttime by installing radar-controlled lights
- A simplified permitting process for group net metered systems that are majority-owned by customers, as well as for rooftop systems
- The creation of a working group to assess ways to increase the ease of citizen participation in energy permitting proceedings

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