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January 19, 2022

Dear Amherst Town Council, Community Resources Committee, and Planning Board,

Amp Energy ("Amp") is a developer of Community Solar projects and we are working with W.D. Cows to develop a solar project on Shutesbury Road in Amherst. I am writing today to voice concern about the solar moratorium, and to simultaneously advocate for Amherst's development of a solar siting bylaw.

A moratorium is unnecessary as the town currently holds significant discretion as to which projects are permitted through its various existing authorities. This includes input into the design considerations of a solar project, which we of course welcome. The proposed moratorium sends a chilling message to a solar development community that is working every day to help Massachusetts meet its decarbonization goals.

It is reasonable for the town of Amherst to develop a solar bylaw, as they are important for the sensible development of solar projects. However, there are many who would advocate for enacting overly restrictive solar bylaws. These would have an overall effect of prohibiting any ground mounted solar development from occurring at all, which would in essence serve as a permanent moratorium.

We respectfully request that the bylaw crafting process be undertaken with the input of solar developers, such as Amp, so that we may provide important context from a land siting and electric grid interconnection perspective. These are the two most significant factors that affect any proposed solar project.

The scarcity of open land in Massachusetts – such as in Amherst - coupled with a rise in population growth and demand for housing has made the siting of solar systems extremely difficult. Solar developers like Amp prioritize placing solar on existing buildings, parking lot canopies, and already cleared land. However, due to prohibitively high construction and interconnection costs, particularly in western MA, it is not always feasible to place solar on these locations.

The development of solar is not a deforestation effort that would undermine the importance or impact of forest habitats. It actually serves to diversify habitats. The Shutesbury Road project is committing to include a pollinator meadow underneath the installed array comprised of native flowering plants. The pollinator meadow stores carbon, plays a part in stormwater management, helps with erosion control, and supports bee habitat.

Amp acknowledges the role of forests in mitigating climate change and advocates for the responsible management of undeveloped land. This is one of the many reasons we aligned with W.D. Cows.

W.D. Cows conserved and actively manages over 5,500 acres of forest and watershed land adjacent to its proposed solar sites. In order to continue their sustainability efforts, they have partnered with Amp to utilize about 2% of their privately owned land to mitigate climate change through solar. These solar projects not only benefit our climate but also provide revenue for the community. For example, our Shutesbury Road project is estimated to generate at least \$70,000 for the town of Amherst annually and to provide clean energy for up to 1,700 homes.

The benefits of solar persist well beyond any monetary gain for communities, landowners, and developers. According to the EPA's calculator, this proposed project alone is estimated to provide a net benefit of offsetting at least 60,000 tons of carbon over its useful lifetime. That is the equivalent of taking well over 1,000 cars off the road. Additionally, at the end of its useful life the solar facility will be decommissioned and removed. Compared to other high-value development ventures such as housing, solar allows forested land to eventually return to its natural state.

I am hopeful that a mutually beneficial relationship can be established between local governments, solar developers, and advocates for our forest habitats. I urge the town of Amherst not to pursue a solar moratorium, but to instead invite solar developers to work alongside you to craft and enact reasonable solar bylaws that will allow us to achieve our collective decarbonization goals.

Please feel free to reach out to me at any time. I welcome the opportunity to engage in a conversation with you on how we can best work together, and am looking forward to doing so.

Sincerely,

Andrew Chabot

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