

Vermonters for a Clean Environment

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Samara Swanston
sswanston@council.nyc.gov
via email

Dear Ms. Swanston,

At the suggestion of your colleague, Bill Murray, I am submitting these comments to you regarding Int. No. 350, one of several bills that we understand will be considered at a hearing tomorrow in the Committee on Housing and Buildings as part of the "sustainable rooftop" legislative package.

Over the past few weeks I have had a number of conversations with Mr. Murray about the impacts of wind turbines on communities. For over a year, Vermonters for a Clean Environment has been working with members of communities that are currently or are slated to be hosts for turbines. What we have found is that large-scale turbines have some very serious impacts – to the health of those who live nearby, to the natural environment, to property values, and to air safety – that can potentially be mitigated but that too often are not addressed in the planning process. Recently we have found that these same issues sometimes come up with smaller turbines as well, including issues with noise impacts.

As a result, we encourage everyone who may have a turbine in their future to ask questions about health, safety, and impacts. This is especially true in the more densely populated areas, where turbines might be near houses, hospitals, and other populated/traveled places.

While we are not certain exactly what the impact would be of the proposed legislation, we have a number of concerns regarding health and safety issues that might arise from installation of “small” turbines. As outlined in the bill, while many units in question could be extremely small, others could weigh well over 1000 pounds and be situated on top of a pole that is 50 feet tall or taller – hardly a low-impact device. These are not “small” turbines – with blade lengths as long as 20 feet or more, these are large mechanical objects that can have significant impacts when placed in densely populated areas.

Safety issues encountered in other situations include, but are not limited to:

- lightning strikes – making sure grounding is done appropriately and safely
- tower rigging requirements and potential for tower collapse
- dangers from debris/ice throw
- fire dangers to surrounding properties
- noise mitigation and process for hearing complaints
- insurance to cover damage to others' property

Some of these issues are discussed in the attached materials from Wind Action. I have provided some but not all of their supporting documentation as well. Not every issue they cover is relevant, but I thought it better to include the entire packet in order to be complete.

It is also worth noting, based on conversations that I understand are currently taking place amongst Council members, that the issues created by the improper placement of larger, utility-scale turbines are even more problematic. These much bigger units, rated at 1.5 MW and larger, have created a wide range of aviation and noise/health issues in other parts of the country. I have attached some additional information on those issues as well.

Given that I am not able to track the legislative calendar closely, I am not sure when would be the best time to offer more detailed testimony on these issues. However, I am eager to do so, and will be grateful for the opportunity to present more complete testimony to the Council on the issues raised by both “small” and utility-scale turbines at any time in the future.

While VCE generally supports efforts to increase the utilization of renewable energy technologies, we have learned the hard way that not every “tool” is right for every situation. Thanks for your work on these important issues. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "MA J.", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Matt Levin
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Attachments

CC: William T. Murray, Legislative Director, Office of Councilman James F. Gennaro
Annette Smith, Executive Director, VCE