

PROPONENT TESTIMONY
HB 118 House Public Utilities Committee
Walter D. Mast – Preble County
March 9, 2021

Chairman Hoops, Vice Chair Ray, Ranking Member Smith, and the members of the Committee. My name is Walter Mast and I reside in Fairhaven, a small village located in Israel Township, Preble County. I am in support of HB 118 that addresses the need for local citizens participation in the responsible siting of utility scale wind and solar projects in Ohio.

The focus of my testimony is based upon my experience as a co-leader of the Israel Township Neighborhood Watch Team and from a 31 year career at Procter and Gamble. I have bachelor and masters degrees in engineering from the Ohio State University and was an Ohio Professional Engineer for decades. During my career, I was an engineer, senior energy engineer, construction manager, operations manager, leader of an \$85 million manufacturing plant renovation/ site clearance project, and international logistics manager.

I have travelled extensively including circumnavigating the world on three occasions; visiting locations as diverse as China, Japan, Russia, India, Africa, Europe, Mexico, and South East Asia. I have observed first-hand unspeakable poverty and pollution beyond description; enough sadness to make angels cry. I am deeply concerned with how the production, operation, and recycling of the solar panels will impact not only my community but the world as a whole.

The proposed solar project in Israel Township is like a black hole. The community has been asked repeatedly to identify concerns, and we have respectively done so. We have provided the questions, but no one from the project team or the government has conducted a meeting in our community to provide unbiased, data based answers to our concerns.

The project is not transparent, so we in the community can only surmise the multitude of issues based upon our limited understanding. The issues we have identified include, but are not limited to the following: increased risk of flooding and erosion, contamination of the land, creeks, and our wells, crime/ security, site clearance risks and costs, increased ambient temperatures, impact on local fire and emergence response personnel, natural disasters such as tornadoes and lightning, impact on wildlife, restoration of the land to productive farm use, why it is necessary to utilize some of the finest farmland in the world to site the panels, the on-going cost impact on our community, and many more.

I was involved in many projects during my career. Every project has risks of some sort. All projects I have been involved with have the risks clearly identified, unbiased risk mitigation plans developed, and included in the presentation to the decision makers. The project is never approved until the decision makers fully understand the risks and comprehend the soundness of the risk mitigation plans. The time to address all of the issues and concerns is before the project is approved, not after approval.

Given the complexity and multitude of issues associated with a large scale solar farm; mutually selected, independent, third party, unbiased risk experts should be employed to help fully identify the risks and the associated mitigation plans. Those who have the authority to approve the project, also, have the responsibility and accountability for the project during its entire life including returning the land to productive farm use. The decision makers need to fully comprehend the real impact of the proposed project throughout the project life cycle.

It is critical the project is done right the first time, because there is seldom a good answer for correcting errors in design, construction, operation, and/or site clearance. Once the decision makers fully understand the total project impact and approve the project, the project details including the risks and risk mitigation plans should be fully and honestly presented in the local community. A referendum vote by honestly and fully informed citizens in the townships affected should be the final step in the project approval. Only then should a project proceed to construction, operation, and eventual demolition.