

**SENATE ENERGY AND PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMITTEE**

**Oral Testimony of Jared Wren**

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**March 23, 2020**

**Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee Intro:**

Chairman Peterson, Vice chair Schuring, Ranking Member Williams and members of the Committee, my name is Jared Wren, Senior Development Associate, at Hecate Energy. I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to the proposed legislation.

It is a tremendous honor to testify in front of this historic body and to discuss this important topic with you today. I am a lifelong resident of the State of Ohio, born and raised in the green hills of Athens County, with the first members of my family settling in eastern Ohio in the early 19th century. My wife Lydia and I reside in Jefferson Township, Franklin County.

Like my grandmother, grandfather, aunts, uncle, and mother before me, I'm a proud Alumnus of Ohio University. Like many Bobcats, our family story is deeply intertwined with that institution. My grandparents Bob and Lois Wren met and fell in love as undergraduates on the brick streets of Athens, where Bob was a varsity baseball and basketball player, returning later to become Head Coach of the Bobcats Baseball team from 1949 to 1972 and ultimately being honored in 1998 by Ohio University named their baseball stadium Bob Wren Stadium. Needless to say, in light of the incredible performance of the Men's Basketball team in the NCAA Tournament, it is a great time to be a Bobcat.

I joined Hecate Energy in 2014, and have since been involved with the development of renewable energy projects, specifically Utility Scale Photovoltaic Solar installations, throughout the United States and in sub-saharan Africa.

A brief introduction to my company, Hecate Energy: Hecate Energy, founded in 2012, has entered into over 2.1 GW of renewable power purchase agreements (PPAs) across 62 PPAs with 31 counterparties. Projects that Hecate has developed and that are constructed or are under construction include 925 MW of solar projects and 58 MWh of battery storage projects totaling over \$1.1 billion in asset value.

Hecate Energy has been active in Ohio since 2016, with a total of 365 MW Certified via the Ohio Power Siting Board's process. The 300 MW Highland Solar Farm's OPSB Application received

its Certificate of Environmental Compatibility and Public Need in May of 2019, and the 65 MW New Market Solar I project was granted a Certificate last Thursday. Both projects will now be working through the post-certification, pre-construction OPSB compliance items necessary to start construction.

These projects represent millions in revenue for Highland County and the applicable school districts via their project specific agreements with the Highland County Commissioners, who approved the PILOT agreements. These projects will pay more than \$120M to local taxing entities in Highland County over the life of the projects. These tax agreements have already been signed with the County.

I field calls and emails every day from folks all over the state of Ohio that are eager to have an opportunity to work on the construction and operation of these projects. The prospects of helping to put hundreds of my fellow Ohioans to work in this state on projects close to home is incredibly exciting. For me personally it is the most gratifying aspect of this work, and why I feel it is imperative to encourage the growth of this industry in the post-COVID economy where rural economies have been hit the hardest.

### **Development Process Overview**

In my role as a Developer with Hecate Energy, I'm engaged in development activities beginning with site acquisition all the way through construction. Depending on project size, it can typically take 12-18 months to achieve full site control and prepare and file an Interconnection Application with PJM, which kicks off a 2-3 year PJM study process.

As we begin to engage a community, developers typically focus first on working with individual landowners willing to participate in the project, and gradually add continuous acreage over time. As site control is achieved, either via real estate Options to Purchase or Options to Lease, the litany of field studies necessary to file an application at the OPSB are started. I will discuss both these studies and local engagement in greater detail.

### **Landowner Engagement**

As activity around the project site increases, and preliminary analysis gives a positive indication for the viability of a site, developers typically spend more and more time engaging with the adjacent, non-participatory landowners and community stakeholders and elected leadership. When I am discussing solar development with folks in a project area either around the kitchen table, or standing outside around my pickup truck in the driveway, there are a few concepts that I work very hard to convey. First of all, that my company, and the project we intend to develop is not a nameless, faceless entity, attempting to approach by stealth and drop a project next door without their knowledge. In fact, it is quite the opposite. I am there to give a face and a name to the project, and let folks know that I am there to hear their concerns, that I understand and respect their property and way of life, and be transparent about our intentions as it relates to development

in their community. We take very seriously our obligation to treat our landowners and community members with respect, and I engage with every landowner as if they were my own neighbor or family member. I am forthright about our intentions, and willing to listen to the thoughts and concerns expressed by the people who will be directly impacted by a project. We encourage public participation, not shy away from it. It is the best way for a developer to learn about the concerns of the area in which we are developing, and most importantly, integrate those concerns into our project design and development approach so as to mitigate as many impacts as possible up front. We want to actively engage in a constructive dialogue with all community stakeholders, which ultimately helps to deliver a more positive outcome for everyone involved.

This is in an important time in the pre-OPSB application phase of a project, whereby we as developers go out to engage with the neighborhood to inform them of our presence, educate them as to the nature of a utility scale solar farm, and start to lay the groundwork for the public interaction that takes place before, during, and after a project has traversed the OPSB process.

### **OPSB Process Overview**

I'd like to now briefly describe the Ohio Power Siting Board Application process, including the exhaustive list of development studies necessary to *even apply* for a Certificate of Environmental Compatibility and Public need from the OPSB. Having completed this process for hundreds of MW of solar generation, I can say without equivocation that it is robust, it is rigorous, and it is equitable. The OPSB conducts a thorough and fact based process to weigh public benefits and costs of a proposed project and imposes licensing conditions to minimize costs. SB52/HB 118 put a thumb on the scale, regardless of the factual analysis or public benefit. The OPSB statutes have been in place since the early 1980s, and over the decades have been used to site generation facilities ranging from coal, single cycle, compressed air storage, combined cycle, combined heat power, coke, wind, and solar.

### **The Ohio Power Siting Board Required studies include:**

- Feasibility and System Impact Studies conducted by PJM the regional transmission organization
- Equipment manufacturer specifications\*
- Vegetation management plan\*
- Community outreach
- Economic impact and land use study
- Critical issues analysis
- Complaint resolution and construction/operation notices\*
- Liability insurance
- Construction route study
- Decommissioning plan and performance bond\*
- Geotechnical engineering study\*
- Horizontal drilling inadvertent return control plan
- Hydrologic study\*
- Wetland and waterbody delineation report
- Glare analysis\* and application of the Federal Aviation Administration review
- Sound level assessment

- Threatened and endangered species habitat survey and coordination with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services and Ohio Department of Natural Resources
- Cultural resource records review and study and concurrence by the Ohio State Historic Preservation Office\*
- Visual resources study and impact mitigation plan\*
- Microwave/AM and FM Radio/Off-Air TV analysis
- Emergency action plan\*
- Stormwater pollution prevention plan
- Spill prevention and countermeasure plan
- National pollutant discharge elimination system
- Best management practices
- (Increased facility design and engineering required)\*

\* Some of the items are Traditionally often not required until post-certificate, prior to construction, but are now required as part upfront application at prior Chairman's request. The solar industry responded by incorporating these additional items into applications prior to filing, which demonstrates the industry's desire to work collaboratively and be responsive to perceived needs identified by the OPSB.

**The OPSB Public Outreach process includes:**

- Public information meeting no more than 90 days before the application is filed
- At least 5 months of investigation by the OPSB staff once the application is filed
  - Investigation includes further coordination with sister agencies and discovery by OPSB staff
  - Case will be suspended if there is a need for more investigation; OPSB staff will recommend denial and/or additional conditions based on investigation
- Opportunity to file comments or intervene
  - Intervention includes right to conduct extensive discovery and appeal rights
- Local public hearing
- Evidentiary hearing
- Letters and newspaper notices notifying the landowners, local officials, and the community of the public information meeting and hearings

The OPSB does not approve an application if not all the studies are complete or coordinations finalized. The application is not deemed complete without compliance with the above.

- The OPSB process is rigorous, with multiple "checkpoints/gates" where a project application must demonstrate that meets a threshold of requirements.
- An application simply will not advance to be considered by the OPSB if it has not demonstrated that it can meet the requirements at various "checkpoints/gates"
- OPSB staff has found applications to be incomplete; these applications do not move forward
- OPSB staff has also issued Staff Reports with negative findings, and a developer might withdraw its application in that circumstance

## **Conclusion**

I will conclude my testimony by reiterating the excruciating level of detail that the OPSB requires, and its emphasis on local engagement. The incorporation of project specific impact mitigation tailored to each Certificate ensures approved projects represent an overwhelmingly positive benefit to the communities in which they are developed.

As a proud child of Appalachia, it is truly exhilarating to be at the tip of the spear as it relates to the deployment of this technology, and the positive impact that it will have on underserved communities like the one that I am from. I would encourage the members of this committee to reconsider the proposed legislation in light of the detail presented by my colleagues and I. Utility scale solar development means job creation, increased local revenues, environmental sustainability, and economic diversification. It is part of Ohio's deep tradition of entrepreneurship, innovation, and regional leadership, and I encourage this body to facilitate its growth, not stifle it. Thank you for your time.