

House Public Utilities Committee
Opponent Testimony—House Bill 118
Lightsource bp—Shanelle Montana

March 23, 2021

Chairman Hoops, Vice Chair Ray and ranking member Smith and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in opposition to House Bill 118. I am Shanelle Montana, Director of Development at Lightsource bp.

America's energy landscape is transforming. Demand for access to clean, local power sources is increasing. Rapidly decreasing technology costs have ushered in a new era of cost-effective renewable energy solutions. With offices across the United States, we're working with local communities, businesses and landowners to develop projects that generate the competitively priced, dependable and clean energy that America wants and needs.

At Lightsource bp, we've been developing solar projects since 2010. We're a global leader in the development and management of solar energy projects, and a 50:50 joint venture with bp. Together with our partner bp, we are enacting real change through our shared mission to accelerate the potential of solar and secure a sustainable, low-carbon future for communities.

Lightsource bp initiated development of the Birch Solar project in early 2020. In August 2020, we began our initial community engagement through meetings with local township and county officials and economic development officials to share our preliminary plans.

In October we began significant community engagement activities to discuss and help shape our plans for Birch Solar and obtain feedback directly from community members themselves prior to submittal of our OPSB permit application. We joined the Lima Allen County Chamber of Commerce. We reached out to the local media. And we hosted four community information meetings – two in-person and two virtual, through which we were able to directly connect with 500 or more residents.

- Our first community meeting was a 5 hour in-person open house held in October. We advertised this meeting via 200 mailers sent to nearby residents. It was covered by the local media, both print and tv.
- Our second community meeting was held in November at the Apollo Career Center in Lima. We advertised this meeting in the local papers, both print and online, and invitations were emailed to all chamber of commerce members. The entire meeting was broadcast live by WTLW TV-44.
- In November, we also held two virtual Public Information Meetings as part of the OPSB process, with staff from the OPSB. We advertised these meetings in the local papers, through mailers to adjacent landowners, through the local media and our project website. The Q&A portion of each of these meetings lasted over 4 hours. For those not able to attend, a pre-recorded presentation about the project and the permitting process was also made available on the project website, along with a mechanism to submit further questions, and answers to commonly asked questions by the community.

We submitted our permit application to the OPSB on February 12th.

Based on our final design considerations for this project location, along with incorporating comments received from the community, we are implementing the following:

- Consolidating the project footprint and thereby reducing the land required for the project equipment (including all of the solar panels) to 1,410 acres. This footprint is part of the OPSB permit applications, with no ability to expand.
- A 6-foot high discreet cedar post farm fence around the project to match the aesthetic of the surrounding area, with hundreds of 5 foot evergreen trees that will top 8 feet tall when mature and shrubs planted outside the fenced in areas within nearby homeowner views to enhance residents' viewsheds and limit project visibility.
- Increased home setbacks with at least 300 feet of green space from any solar panels, including a 300 foot setback from any panels visible from Breese Road, and the elimination of all solar panels originally identified north of Breese Road. These setbacks are part of the permit application and will be maintained as green space during the full project life with no ability to expand into this area.
- Maintaining the natural environment of the area and conserving habitats by not removing wooded areas or wetlands, with generous setbacks from any wetland areas to ensure they are undisturbed.
- Creation of pollinator habitat to attract pollinator species and support local agriculture, as well as incorporation of sheep grazing to maintain vegetation and employ Ohio farmers. Wide spread, deep rooted pollinator habitat can serve to improve stormwater retention versus tilled row crop acreage, and along with sheep grazing serves to preserve the land in accordance with the Shawnee Comprehensive Plan which promotes agricultural use of Shawnee Township. All while adding millions of dollars annually above what standard agricultural tax would pay. We'll also be partnering with The Ohio State University to conduct research on the benefits of honey bee foraging to the community's agriculture ecosystem.
- Commitment to recycling all solar panels, including any panels damaged during construction, operations, and all panels remaining at the end of project life requiring decommissioning using qualified US recycling facilities that have been fully approved by the Solar Energy Industry Association.
- Commitment to only using Tier 1 manufactured solar panels that have passed testing protocols established by the EPA under Federal Law, to ensure that even if broken into pieces the solar panels will not release harmful amounts of any hazardous materials into the environment.
- A \$500,000 community fund for Allen and Auglaize Counties for use in connection with various programs to be recommended by the community.
- An enhanced Neighboring Landowner Benefit Program for homeowners whose property is bordering our leased land or whose homes are within 500 feet of the project's solar panels to benefit with financial compensation ranging from \$10,000 to \$50,000 depending on proximity for the inconveniences created by the installation of the project on their neighbor's land. The program includes a Home Value Agreement for homes in closest proximity to the project, and is voluntary - no support for the project or confidentiality is required on the part of the homeowner.

Accordingly, the OPSB public process was instrumental in allowing the voice of the community to be heard. Lightsource bp has continued community engagement by updating our website (www.birchsolarfarm.com) with 3D video simulations of the Project Area once built along with Frequently Asked Questions and educational information about solar energy and the Project. In addition, we have continued to communicate with local government officials and other community stakeholders on development activities.

Lightsource bp's approach is to work with the local community and neighbors to ensure that we develop and construct our projects as a good neighbor and long-term member of the local community. This translates to bringing new job opportunities, economic benefits, and increasing the revenue to local schools and other public services (by approximately \$2.7 annually, making the project one of the largest generators of new revenue in area).

Currently, the state of Ohio has one of the most regulated siting processes in the United States with similar state structures existing in California, New York and Minnesota. The process allows OPSB experts to use their area of specialization to review all aspects of the project from sound to environmental features to architectural history and everything in between. This process allows for well thought out and expert project designs that ensure a solar energy project will be suitable and beneficial for both the state and the local community.

Just as an example, we submitted detailed engineering studies in our permit application to the OPSB on hydrology, stormwater analysis, and drain tile assessment for Birch Solar. The stormwater analyses of the proposed solar site were conducted in accordance with the requirements of the Allen County Stormwater Management and Sediment Control Regulations. The Auglaize County, Ohio Stormwater Asset Management Inventory was also utilized for the study. Appropriate stormwater management as per County requirements will be adhered to.

Furthermore, as demonstrated, the Public Information Meeting process and pre-application submission brings the local community into the project design and development and allows an avenue for community involvement. As can be seen with Birch Solar, this community involvement and participation driven by the OPSB changes and shapes a project to reflect each individual community.

I welcome the opportunity to meet and discuss any matters important to members of the committee. We have a deep understanding and years of experience in utility-scale solar. Thank you for the opportunity to provide opposition testimony on Senate Bill 52 and House Bill 118.