

SB 52 Proponent Testimony – Jim Feasel
Ohio House Public Utilities Committee
Chairman: James Hoops
6/22/2021

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the committee,

I am writing today as a farmer, a landowner, and a retired business owner who has the opportunity to participate in a big way in both wind and solar projects on my property. I have been contacted by 5 developers over the past years, 2 for wind and 3 for solar. And, like other landowners, it seems as though I should be able to build whatever I want on my property. But what kind of a self-serving citizen would I be if I stood here and demanded that I be allowed to impose such a massive transformation onto my local area without knowing for sure that the surrounding community thinks it is a good idea?

My experience in property development has taught me that Ohio law severely limits any restrictions for agricultural land uses. But, with a very few exceptions, one being construction of electrical generation facilities, there has always been some sort of regulation on uses other than agriculture. I realize that if wind turbines or solar panels are built on my land then those acres are no longer used for agriculture but for industrial purposes. So I would be wrong to come in here and try to blur the line between two completely different land uses and demand exemption from local regulation. I would expect higher profits from any acres I convert to industrial use, but I would also expect that I have to play by different rules.

Ohio law has always given land use exemptions to agricultural uses like hogbarns and the language in SB52 does not change anything when it comes to such use, it only modifies regulations on two specific industrial uses. All of the opposing “property rights” arguments trying to refute that are misdirected and being used to promote profiteering agendas having nothing to do with farming or what is good for a community, in my opinion.

SB-52 is extremely important to the people of Ohio because it would allow local control on the siting of wind and solar projects which are so large that they can transform the entire character of a community if not done carefully. Currently the OPSB has full authority and overrides any and all local planning. And, whether because of statute or because of internal OPSB rules, the net result is they pay no attention to local priorities when they make their decisions, nor are they motivated in any way to do so.

The OSPB has been allowing 600 ft tall industrial wind turbines to be built only 1,125 feet from neighboring property when turbine manufacturer safety manuals tell all workmen to stay clear of the turbines a distance of 3,280 feet while thunderstorms are in the area, something which we all know happens frequently in Ohio. OPSB is also allowing wind projects to obstruct approaches to local airports, industrialize areas surrounding nature preserves, and transform some rather highly populated rural residential areas into industrial sites.

It is clear that Ohioans cannot trust their state agencies to be concerned about local land use. In Columbus they seem only concerned about big business making money today and not about the future desirability of Ohio as a place to live. I've heard some Legislators oppose this bill because they think it is not "pro-business". But if Ohio does not respect the safety, judgment, or priorities of its own people then it will never be viewed as a good place for business, which at its very core, is people. You cannot abuse people and then expect them to support your business.

A policy of having State level politicians and agencies make the decisions on siting these massive industrial wind and solar projects has already been tried and proven to be woefully inadequate, even in the most basic function of protecting public safety, much less allowing for other priorities which communities may have for their development.

So please demonstrate that you have some faith in the ability of Ohio's citizens to make wise choices about the future of their own communities by voting YES on SB-52. The time is now as this issue is only growing more serious and contentious by the day.

Thank you.

Jim Feasel
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