

Proponent Testimony

Sub.SB 52  
Senate Energy and Utilities Committee  
Hope Taft, chair  
Little Miami Watershed Network  
May 19, 2021

Chairman McColley, Vice Chair Schuring, Ranking Member Williams and members of the committee thank you for letting me speak with you today.

My name is Hope Taft and I live in Greene County on the banks of the Little Miami River where Bob and I were lucky enough to find a home after we left Columbus in 2007. Because we live so close to the river, I watch it carefully, and have started several organizations to help protect it and other scenic rivers in Ohio. The Little Miami River was the Ohio's first State and National Scenic River and was inscribed in the program in 1969. Since 2010 the Little Miami Watershed Network and River Kleeners have taken nearly 12 tons of trash and 900 tires from Greene County alone. But besides visible trash we monitor the river using an Ohio developed system that relies on macroinvertebrates to tell us how clean the water is. Some are very sensitive to pollution of various types that we don't see with an unaided eye. The major threats to all Ohio rivers are the same as the Little Miami's: sediment and polluted runoff due to construction and hardscapes.

Because our main concern is water quality, we like to say what happens on the land affects the water, because we all live in a watershed. We are not against solar per se, we just think there are better places and ways to do it than the haphazard way it is happening in Ohio now. We also think there are lots of unknowns as to its effectiveness for Ohio's climate and landscape, and are not sure it is as environmentally friendly as portrayed on a global and total production basis. We are a rare voice for the environment.

The Little Miami Watershed Network is very concerned about the utility sized solar facility stated to be sited near the headwaters of the Little Miami River because it will cause both. As I drove to Columbus today, I passed a sign on I-71 advertising the state's largest mega development site of 1500 acres, just north of Tanger Mall. This is the same size as the proposed solar utility site under consideration right now by the OPSB, but it is all in one big piece whereas the solar facility is not. See the attached map.

In this map, protected land and watersheds [Glen Helen, John Bryan State Park, Clifton Gorge, the Little Miami River and Clark Run] are very close and will be impacted by this development. The yellow is the proposed solar utility site and the red are the private residences that will be situated within the utility plant zone. Not on this map is the newest ODNR state park to honor Tecumseh and American Indians at Ole Town, just a few miles south on SR 68.

As you can see, it will have a big impact on the local property owners and natural areas, preserves and parks, much of which is protected by ODNR. There is nothing regular in the boundaries of the yellow which will surround some houses on 3 sides.

I attended a public hearing of the Greene County Commissioners recently and listened to citizens's concerns about this project being imposed on their community. Only one absentee landowner spoke in favor of the facility and the money it would bring to her pocket. All the other speakers in the 3-hour meeting were against this imposition from Columbus and were predicting reduced property values like Indiana homes have experienced. They also expressed concern for the environment and the impact it would have on wildlife, and their views.

One 9-year-old testified that he was thrilled when his parents recently bought their dream home in rural Greene County so he could play outdoors as much as he wanted in a safe environment. Now they are sorry they moved to Greene County because outside his bedroom window would be a 50 ft. green strip and then row after row after row after row of solar panels. – as far as his eye could see. He was almost in tears thinking about the change to his childhood this was going to bring.

Research on the environmental impact of large scale solar facilities, or wind for that matter, is hard to find, but what studies we have found, point to unintended consequences, such as the killing of Mayflies, the adult form of a macroinvertebrate that tells us the quality of the streams and rivers. They mistake the panels for water and lay their eggs in the wrong place. We recently did a Stream Quality Monitoring test on Clark Run and its water quality was incredibly high, especially considering it runs through agricultural field. We want it to stay that way because it feeds directly into the Little Miami River!

It's easy to guess what 6-8 foot chain link fences with barb wire will do to animal migration and habitat, and then there is the long term consequences of soil compaction after the facility is built and its construction run off has already reached the water.

While this committee doesn't have control over best practices, although I wish it did, it does have the ability to let townships and citizens control where and how such facilities are built. If the township could designate an area- an Energy Development District- I suspect it would have a more regular shape than that proposed for Greene County and negative consequences could be better controlled. I suspect it would address local land use planning concerns. I suspect it would cover the local community's culture and preserve what its citizens value so the best local resources of the township could be protected. If local citizens could vote on the issue, I suspect it might begin to heal the animosity of neighbor against neighbor I sensed at the public hearing. They might even feel better about having their land gobbled up to feed the East Coast's energy appetite!

Just so you don't think this issue and desire for local input is only in Greene County, Sen. Wilson has been walking with me and others from Ft. Ancient to Newark via Chillicothe in support of the ancient mound builders. As we recently walked the byways of Ross County, near Paint

Creek State Park, we saw signs against the utility sized solar facility in the planning stages for that area. And when I look at the map of the OPSB of projects they have approved or are considering, it's hard to imagine that most of your districts will not be touched by this divisive issue. You can help ease the pain of your constituents by passing Sub. SB 52 and getting the House's approval and getting it signed by the Governor in time for it to make a difference. I hope you are not too late to help the Little Miami River and the residents of Greene County. They are looking to you for help.