

Ohio Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee

Opposition Testimony

Senate Bill 52

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Lightsource bp

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Chairman McColley, Vice Chair Schuring, Ranking Member Williams, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today in opposition to Senate Bill 52.

My name is Shanelle Montana and I am the Director of Development for Lightsource bp. Lightsource bp has roots here in the state of Ohio with 50% of our ownership being from bp. For decades, Ohio has positioned itself as a leader in energy, encouraging economic development and growth. I am here today to oppose SB 52, a bill that stifles economic development and growth and threatens Ohio's ability to remain an energy leader.

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The Birch Solar Project began development in early 2020. After identifying a substation, the Project gained traction when dozens of farm families, residents of Allen and Auglaize Counties, had interest in being a part of the project. Throughout 2020 Lightsource bp reviewed a broad swath of land, and, by August of 2020, a rough boundary began to take shape; this made the Project more "real." In the interest of transparency, Lightsource bp announced to the local community that the Project was moving forward. Between August of 2020 and October of 2020, Lightsource bp staff met with County and Township officials, school staff, economic development organizations, and anyone else in the community who wanted to learn about the Project. In late October of 2020 and one month later in November of 2020, Lightsource bp held public, in-person meetings in Lima to answer questions and provide information about the project. In preparation for the Project's permit Lightsource held two additional online meetings (often referred to as Public Information Meetings or PIMs). In February of 2021 Birch Solar's Ohio Power Siting Board ("OPSB") application was submitted.

**The Birch Solar Project is an approximately \$350 million capital investment into Allen and Auglaize County. Upon completion, the Project will be the largest revenue generator for Allen County.** This means \$2.7 million annually to local schools and governments. This also means 400 jobs and additional long-term jobs after the project is constructed.

Relative to other states, energy generation in Ohio is highly regulated. The OPSB process is rigorous and expensive including thousands of pages of over 30 studies; it is also based on science and fact. The Birch Solar OPSB application was thousands of pages long and took nearly twelve months to complete.

Change is hard. Unlike states around Ohio, solar is very new. Yes, it is a change, but that change is required if Ohio wants to continue as an energy leader. Thoughtful change must rely on open dialogue and community engagement.

Three months after Lightsource bp announced the Birch Solar Project, Shawnee Township approved a resolution against the Project. A resolution, that, according to this bill, is supposed to stop a Project like Birch. The meeting at which the resolution passed included no opportunity for the Lightsource bp to

testify or present (we were only allowed to “chat on Facebook”), no evidence was taken, no studies were reviewed, and no questions were asked of experts. The resolution was not based on science or fact. Indeed, no details specific to the Project were discussed because no such details existed at that point: it was too early in development. The resolution was passed before there was a final boundary, any studies, or even a permit to consider.

Solar projects offer an opportunity for school funding, biodiversity, infrastructure investment, and jobs. SB 52 allows a knee jerk reaction to the fear of change which is often guided by misinformation and mistruths to determine Ohio’s future as an energy leader. SB 52 is not local control, but a dual regulatory process. If Ohio wants to dually regulate energy, it will be a loss for Ohioans and particularly for farmers. Farmers have worked hard for generations, through good years and bad years—they have taken care of their land and provided food and feed to meet the growing global demands. These same farmers are now looking forward to providing energy for their community and Ohio—and deserve the right to make their own decisions for the use of their land. Most farmers will use these new resources to invest in their farm and Ohio’s economy.

This bill is the farthest thing from a compromise, but the concerns that a neighboring project community may have about a project can be addressed. OPSB changes to notification, involvement and the siting process are welcome in the OPSB rulemaking and in legislation. The energy industry was not consulted in the creation of this bill but we welcome a productive conversation. Change is coming in energy generation and the economic opportunity associated with that change will indeed pass Ohio by under SB 52.