



SWANTON WIND, LLC

October 20, 2015

Dear Swanton Selectboard:

We write to you as longtime Swanton residents with deep roots in this community and a long history of positive contributions to the local economy. You know us as job creators who have run a successful regional business and as builders and sellers of affordable housing that has grown the Swanton tax base. We write to ask for the fairness and civility that should be afforded to all members of this community, but has not been afforded to us in connection with Swanton Wind.

We understand that there is great frustration with the lack of “local control” over renewable energy development in Vermont. It is unfortunate, however, that this frustration is being vented with such passion that it has seemingly overcome any desire for a reasonable, calm local conversation based on the facts and credible science.

In response to the urgent moral crisis of climate change, energy production is evolving away from the fossil-fuel fired polluting power plants that still dangerously dominate the regional electrical grid we Vermonters rely on for the electricity in our homes and businesses. The move toward more clean, renewable, fuel-free sources like the sun and the wind is a big change. We appreciate the fact that change can be hard.

Some may prefer the status quo of out-of-sight-out-of-mind power generation, even if that means being complicit in the creation of more pollution that harms the environment we all must rely on and forfeits the chance to become more energy independent.

Fortunately, Vermont has now chosen, as it has so many times in its history, to embrace change and to lead the way toward a better, cleaner, more energy-secure future. In fact, our local representatives Marianna Gamache and Brian Savage were among those elected leaders who set us on this important course by voting, just last year, to establish ambitious yet necessary renewable energy targets in state law.

In times of change, we must be able to rely on our elected leaders to set the tone and create the opportunities for calm and open dialogue. While we hope for such a respectful dialogue moving forward, we ask you to consider whether Swanton Wind is being given a fair opportunity for dialogue based on facts and science.

In March, we came before this Board to inform you that we were conducting the studies and investigations necessary to apply for a Certificate of Public Good from the Public Service Department. We laid out the long process we would have to go through before winning approval and we outlined plans for community meetings, which we have and are still following through on. As reflected in the minutes, the meeting closed this way: “The board wished them luck and thanked them for informing the board about this project.”

In the ensuing months, Selectboard meetings and public communications have sadly and inexplicably become a forum for misinformation and character attacks against us and our project.

The claim made in the Selectboard's September 24 letter—that our project “imperils” state efforts to clean up Lake Champlain—is just one example of a situation where the Selectboard has jumped to a conclusion without giving any indication of considering facts to the contrary. Available data compiled by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources,¹ the taxpayer-funded regulators of the state's water resources, shows that effective stormwater controls at the wind farm in Sheffield, Vermont have protected existing high levels of water quality in the streams surrounding that project during and after its construction. State regulations require Swanton Wind to employ similar water quality protection measures as those used so effectively at Sheffield. It is notable that the Sheffield project is significantly larger than our project, and is located on higher elevation terrain. The Agency of Natural Resources study clearly shows that Vermont wind farms can generate clean energy while protecting clean water.

We are also concerned that the Selectboard has jumped to conclusions about the negative health impacts of wind turbines without carefully considering peer-reviewed scientific evidence to the contrary.²

Turning to more personal issues, we are most troubled by the incomplete information presented in relation to our past homebuilding activities that have added to the tax base of Swanton. We have acknowledged and accepted responsibility for the wetland violations described in the Selectboard's September 24 letter. What the letter fails to explain, however, is that the state and federal regulators who investigated the complaints ultimately concluded the activities did not result in any “undue, adverse effects to the proper function of the significant wetland off of Rocky Ridge Road in Swanton.”³ The Army Corps of Engineers reached a similar conclusion in declining to take further enforcement action once proper permits were applied for and granted.⁴

We are also disappointed by the letter's implied accusation that no construction stormwater permit was obtained for the housing development when in fact we did receive such coverage. The attached public record, which is easily obtainable from the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, shows our authorization for the project under the construction stormwater permit.

For months, we have heard complaints that this project is on the “fast track.” Yet it appears that the Selectboard and certain project neighbors are the ones who are really in a rush to make a judgment without taking advantage of opportunities to become more fully informed or waiting until we file a Certificate of Public Good application. Only one of the Selectboard members attended the September 10 informational open house meeting we hosted at the Village Offices, making our team of project experts available to answer questions from all members of the public. The Selectboard's subsequent September 24 letter reflects that unfortunate disregard for due diligence into the true facts. It follows on the heels of Selectboard meetings where

¹ *Biological Monitoring of the FirstWind Project, Sheffield, VT 2010-2013*. Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation available at <https://swantonwindvt.files.wordpress.com/2015/06/biological-monitoring-of-the-first-wind-project-final-pdf.pdf>

² *Wind Turbines and Health: A Critical Review of the Scientific Literature*, JOEM Vol. 56, No. 11, p. e127 (2014) (emphasis added).

³ VT Department of Environmental Conservation Notice of Conditional Use Determination #2007-506 available at http://townofswantonvermont.weebly.com/uploads/1/2/0/3/12032471/state_of_vt_anr_rocky_ridge.pdf

⁴ Army Corps of Engineers letter to Gerald Belisle, November 4, 2008
http://townofswantonvermont.weebly.com/uploads/1/2/0/3/12032471/dept_of_army_rocky_ridge.pdf

misinformation and wild speculation was freely shared from the floor and then disseminated through the use of a town-maintained website. That misinformation remains on the website to this day despite our notifying the town of its inaccuracy.

The hasty call for a town-wide vote on a project whose details have yet to be finalized gives us little hope of a fair result, especially in an environment so clouded by the spread of fear and misinformation. Nonetheless, we ask that the Selectboard lead by example moving forward by taking the time to get the facts and engaging in a respectful dialogue about Swanton Wind, a project we are proud to propose as local residents and business-owners seeking to make a contribution to our community's economy and clean energy future.

Sincerely,

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and flourishes, representing the Belisle family.

The Belisle Family

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ashley Belisle" in a cursive script.