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February 4, 2021

Freeport Planning Board
c/o Caroline Pelletier, Town Planner
30 Main Street
Freeport, ME 04032

RE: Solar Energy Systems Proposed Changes to Ordinance

Dear Planning Board:

Many thanks for your time, careful consideration of this issue, and commitment to our town. I was not recognized to speak during the public hearing on February 3, apparently due to a technical issue with Zoom. So, I am submitting my comments this way with the hope you will forward them to the Town Council, or, should they return the Ordinance back to you, that you will give the issue I raise all due consideration.

In our collective zeal to be leaders in “sustainability” and support clean energy, as I do, one very important issue is overlooked in your proposed changes. Specifically, there is no prohibition on “land and vegetation clearing” in large, existing wooded areas of our town. Forest fragmentation is a very serious threat to habitats, drinking water supplies and the character of our town. Our coastal forest areas are especially important for migratory birds and groundwater recharge. Further, in our race to address carbon and climate issues, we should not remove carbon sinks – forests – for the sake of solar arrays.

This issue is of particular concern in the “Dark Gray, Small Solar Farm” areas of Freeport where a significant number of forest blocks remain. Even a 2-acre clearing of native forest, in the midst of a larger forest block, will have a dramatic impact on the habitat, creating perforations and edge habitat that will decrease nesting suitability and success for warblers, for instance. Our numerous forest blocks set Freeport apart from many coastal towns in Maine. Let’s use existing, suitable open areas.

I see that the proposed changes include sign-off by the Maine Natural Areas Program and Inland Fisheries & Wildlife, but the list of items is very narrowly defined and likely not sufficient to prevent the perforation of a forest block. The Ordinance needs to address this issue specifically.

Further, the map is too broadly drawn and should instead more precisely decipher appropriate areas including current open lands (though not on productive agricultural soils) and eliminate areas of large forest blocks. For example, successful solar arrays have been erected on closed landfills, and ours is not identified as an area for a Large Solar Farm as perhaps it should.

Thank you for consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,

