

STATEMENT OF MATTHEW KNICKERBOCKER
FIRST SELECTMAN, TOWN OF BETHEL
IN SUPPORT OF GB 6360 – AN ACT CONCERNING IMPLEMENTATION OF
CONNECTICUT’S COMPREHENSIVE ENERGY STRATEGY
MARCH 7, 2013

Senator Duff, Representative Reed, and members of the Joint Committee on Energy and Telecommunications, my name is Matthew Knickerbocker and I am the First Selectman for the Town of Bethel. Thank you for allowing me to testify in support of the virtual net metering provisions of GB 6360.

The Town of Bethel is committed to the use of renewable energy as part of a comprehensive strategy to lower energy costs and reduce our environmental footprint. In keeping with this goal, in January of 2012 the Town issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) seeking bids from project developers for a 1 megawatt solar generation facility located at the town’s closed solid waste management facility. Given the rather limited on-site energy use at the landfill facility itself, the expectation was that this ground mounted solar system would offset the usage of other, more significant municipal loads throughout the town including the town hall, school complex and police station under a virtual net metering configuration. This arrangement would not only enable the Town to put to more effective use otherwise idle land, it would offer the town greater predictability and control of our energy costs through a long-term power purchase arrangement (PPA) with the winning developer. Further, a PPA would obviate the need for Bethel to seek additional bonding authority, and assume the technology risk as would be required were Bethel to purchase the solar system outright.

Bethel received several proposals from competent solar developers. Without exception, the developers informed us that the viability of their proposals was contingent on reform of Connecticut’s virtual net metering statutes. Specifically, Section 121’s requirement that the Town own the solar system in order to be eligible to virtually net meter stood as an insurmountable barrier to our plans. Further, it became evident that Section 121’s valuation of net metering credits at the wholesale generation rate would be an insufficient incentive for the Town to develop a cost-effective solar system capable of competing in the utilities’ Zero Emission Renewable Energy Credit (ZREC) auction. In sum, it became readily apparent that the Town’s plans for a virtually net metered solar system could not move forward absent a major change in law.

With that background, on behalf of the residents and businesses of Bethel, I am pleased to support GB 6360. Section 5 of this bill directly addresses the impediments to an effective virtual net metering program. Specifically, we support the provisions of the bill that would: 1) extend eligibility to systems subject to a long-term contract or lease; and 2) provide greater value for the net metering credits created by an on-site renewable energy system. If adopted by the General Assembly, we are confident that this legislation will breathe new life into our proposal, and the many similar proposals on the drawing boards in municipalities across Connecticut. It will afford us the opportunity to gain greater control over our energy costs, which represent a significant part of our overall budget, and enable the town to redeploy these savings to other important governmental functions.

We thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

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