

The Green Committee is urging all Windsor residents to help get legislation passed that would allow us to receive maximum financial benefit from the solar array which started providing electricity to the town office during June 2018. As many of you know, the array is currently considered to be a “private” not “public” installation, and as such, we receive a lower reimbursement rate for the electricity we generate from the panels. State Sen. Adam Hinds and State Rep. Paul Mark have introduced a piece of legislation, S1974, that would correct this matter, but it is stuck in the Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities, and Energy.

We believe that an onslaught of letters from Windsor residents (and friends!) would help move things along. Would you send a letter? Below is a sample letter that you could simply copy and send (by email or snail mail), or use as a guide for your own letter. You can also find a link to this letter, and other relevant information, on the town website, www.windsormass.com, under BOARDS & DEPARTMENTS then GREEN COMMITTEE.

SAMPLE LETTER:

Dear Chairs Barrett and Golden,

I am a resident of Windsor and asking you to expedite bill S1974 through the Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities and Energy. Our town needs this bill to pass in order to get maximum benefit from our recently installed municipally owned solar array!

The Town of Windsor is currently spending more than \$2000 per year more for electricity than was anticipated when we installed the system, because we were not informed that our array would be designated as “private” instead of “public”.

It is absolutely absurd that a municipal installation--designed to generate electricity for public facilities such as our town offices, library, town hall, and police department—would be considered “private”.

Please help us – and other small towns in a similar situation – correct this situation as soon as possible.

Thank you,

YOUR NAME
YOUR ADDRESS

Email to:

Mike.barrett@masenate.gov
Thomas.golden@mahouse.gov
Carolyn.dykema@mahouse.gov
Marc.pacheco@masenate.gov
cc: Adam.hinds@masenate.gov

cc: Paul.mark@mahouse.gov

Or mail to:

Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities and Energy

Senate Contact

24 Beacon Street, Room 109-D

Boston, MA 02133

House Contact

24 Beacon Street, Room 473B

Boston, MA 02133

cc: Sen. Adam Hinds

100 North Street, Suite 410

Pittsfield, MA 01201

cc: Rep. Paul Mark

PO Box 114

Dalton, MA 01227

Below find the Windsor Green Committee's letter to the Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities and Energy:

Dear Chairs Barrett and Golden,

We are writing to urge you to expedite the process of moving bill S1974 through the Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities and Energy, and to ensure it gets reported out favorably. This is a bill that would change the designation of municipally owned solar arrays from "private" to "public."

Our solar array is less than 60 KW, and because we are a municipality it is designated as "private." Under the current regulations, a 20 KW (AC) single phase array is not exempt from the net metering cap. As a result of this, we are unable to sell our solar-generated electricity at the "retail" rate (of approximately 20 cents/KWh) and instead are compensated at the much lower "wholesale" rate (of 4 cents/KWh). This means that the town is having to spend more than \$2000 per year more for electricity than was anticipated when we installed the system (not having been informed of the "private" designation).

Being designated as "private" has wreaked havoc on our town's efforts to move to renewable resources and save money at the same time. We are aware of at least two other towns in Western Massachusetts (Sandisfield and Cummington) that are caught in the same bind and having to rethink their plans (and outlay of funds) for solar installations. It is possible, of course, that other towns are also affected—we have no access to such information.

We do not think the Commonwealth intended this sort of complication for small towns, and hope that S1974 is an expeditious solution to this problem. We are grateful to Sen. Adam Hinds and Rep. Paul Mark for sponsoring this bill, and hope that you can facilitate its being forwarded to the floors of the House and Senate for a vote.

We would advocate that in the long run, the Legislature will address the larger issues created by the net metering cap. But in the meantime, this would be a solution for small towns.

(Below we have included a detailed explanation of the challenge created by this problem.)

Sincerely,

Windsor Green Committee

Stu Besnoff, Chair, stu@alpinesolarheat.com, 413-684-3950

Mark Barrette, markbarrette@icloud.com, 413-212-0345

Jan Bradley, janet.bradley2@gmail.com, 413-413-684-3732

Holly Higinbotham, higinbo@hotmail.com, 413-212-4352
Bob Meyers, windalewoods@verizon.net, 413-684-3463
Marnie Meyers, windalewoods@verizon.net, 413-684-3463

Addendum:

From June 2018-2019, we have documented a one-year electricity expense of more than \$2,000 in Windsor due to the lack of net metering. Additionally, our plans to finish shifting to air source heat pumps (ASHPs) may be halted. The competitive green community grant, which Windsor recently received, includes funding to complete installation of ASHPs in the town office building, which will complete our plan to eliminate oil heat. Our plan was based on not having to pay for electricity because we installed the solar array. At this point, though, it makes more sense to delay the whole project, forego some of the grant, and pay more for electricity—unless we are able to avail ourselves of the net metering rate for reimbursement.

The towns of Sandisfield and Cummington are now considering construction of photovoltaic arrays to provide electricity for their town-owned buildings. Their consideration now involves measures to avoid the “private” designation, within the current regulations, but it will cost them more. In both towns, the electrical load indicates a solar array connected to the grid between 20 and 25 KW AC. If the connection is made to a three-phase circuit, rather than the more common single-phase circuit, the exemption for PV arrays of less than 25 KW AC would apply. If these towns build and connect to three-phase at 25 KW or less, net metering will be available.

Most town halls and town office buildings are wired for single phase, similar to most private residences and small businesses. To use the exemption cited above, it will be necessary for Sandisfield and Cummington to bring three-phase power into their facilities. An estimated cost for the new wiring is \$5,000 per installation.

Designating public property as ‘private’ is having a negative financial impact on small towns in Massachusetts. In addition to the examples described, there may be others which we do not know about. Climate change mitigation efforts are being hampered by expending public funds at a higher rate than necessary due to the ‘private’ designation.