

# Government Administration and Elections Committee

## JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No:** HB-5551 / [Bill Status](#) / [Public Hearing Testimony](#)

AN ACT CONCERNING PROCEEDINGS OF THE SITING COUNCIL AND

**Title:** OTHER REQUIREMENTS CONCERNING CERTAIN UTILITY EXPENDITURES.

**Vote Date:** 3/23/2026

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable Substitute

**PH Date:** 3/18/2026

**File No.:**

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### SPONSORS OF BILL:

The Government Administration and Elections Committee

### REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill would modify provisions concerning the Connecticut Siting Council, including modifying its membership, establishing the Consumer Counsel as a party in proceedings, and modifying submission notification requirements for council applications. The reason for this bill is to provide more transparency in the CSC process for review of applications for energy projects that effect municipalities. Communities including East Windsor that have a large solar farm presence in their community (over 100MW) would be given the veto power over additional projects and add a local representative for these cases. The goal of this added involvement from municipalities is to encourage public engagement and satisfaction, as residents of these areas have expressed dissatisfaction with numerous solar farms being built in their communities and covering farmland and natural spaces. Further, the aim of this local involvement is to distribute solar projects more evenly across communities in the future. This bill would also increase the presence of other commissioners on this council in the hopes of increasing expertise on environmental subject matter.

### SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE (IF APPLICABLE):

Allows for alternate DEEP or PURA designees; amends the new information required to be included in applications to repair, upgrade, or replace a transmission line, substation, or switchyard; allows good cause extension of 30-day deadline for analysis of non-transmission alternatives; allows rate recovery by electric companies if required by federal law despite the bill's prohibitions; creates Consumer Counsel Utility Control Fund to fund certain OCC activities instead of public benefits charges.

## RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

**Melanie Bachman, Executive Director, Connecticut Siting Council**: Ms. Bachman opposed this bill. She expressed that this bill would give the DEEP commissioner veto power over CSC decisions which negates the CSC balancing process under the Public Utility Environmental Standards Act. Ms. Bachman opposed the addition of ad hoc membership, and detracted from CSC standards and discretion. Ms. Bachman believes that this bill could increase ratepayer costs, as well as thwart state policy goals by giving municipalities too much veto power. Ms. Bachman provides specific amendment recommendations in her written testimony.

**Claire E. Coleman, Office of Consumer Counsel, Consumer Counsel**: Ms. Coleman submitted a general comment regarding this bill. Ms. Coleman expressed support for transparency, strengthening public engagement, and appropriately considering energy decisions. Ms. Coleman also expressed concerns about OCC involvement and the funding, staffing, and resources necessary for the proposed amendment. She expressed concerns that funding new positions in OCC through the Systems Benefit charge will lead to an increase in the public benefits category and will result in inconsistent funding streams for OCC employees.

## NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

**48 East Windsor residents, 4 Ellington residents, and 15 others expressed their support for this bill**: Residents voiced that this bill would help prevent more solar farms in their community, which has been a source of ongoing concerns. Many expressed their support for renewable energy development and solar overall but believe this bill will provide important protections for municipalities and communities that are directly affected by them. They highlighted concerns about fairness and equity, with 25-30% of solar farms being situated in East Windsor. Members of the Broad Brook community of East Windsor noted that all facilities are located within a 2-3 mile radius of their neighborhood. 90% of projects are approved, which leads residents to believe that the CSC favors the developers.

Residents all shared concerns about the community impact of having so many solar farms concentrated in one area, and believe the council should review cases cumulatively, rather than singularly, considering the building effect on a community as more farms are built. They expressed concerns about the impact on wildlife habitat, valuable farmland, property values, and town culture and heritage. Several residents specifically noted that they bought or built property in East Windsor due to the open landscape, which is no longer there due to the large amount of land being used for solar projects. One resident suggested focusing solar development in areas other than farmland and open space, such as former industrial sites, retired landfills, or state properties.

Several residents expressed concerns for the burden placed on the town's volunteer fire departments due to the incidence and risk of fire. They also expressed concerns that there have not been enough studies about converting decommissioned solar projects back to farmland and are concerned about if it is feasible. Multiple residents cited the Gravel Pit Solar project in East Windsor, which was approved despite concerns from residents.

Residents also support this bill because it will provide the CSC with more environmental expertise, and it will give members of the effected community advanced notice to participate in the decision-making process. Residents pointed to Section 9 and expressed that giving municipalities a choice in whether the projects proceed in their community restores balance and fairness. Residents that participated in CSC proceedings previously noted that the process feels unfair because developers and applicants have legal teams and more resources than residents of municipalities.

**Said Anwar, State Senator, Connecticut General Assembly**: Senator Anwar expressed support for this bill, specifically citing issues in the towns of East Windsor and Ellington. Senator Anwar supports municipal representation in siting matters and the increased community engagement that this bill would enable. He specified that East Windsor houses more than a quarter of sited solar facilities in the state and supports Section 9 which requires the citing council to hear from the leading body of the town when a solar facility is proposed.

**James Berardino, Legislative Director, Connecticut Council of Small Towns**: Mr. Berardino expressed his support for this bill, expressing that some small towns are disproportionately burdened by solar projects. He supports that this bill would give municipalities an earlier opportunity to provide input on proposed projects, and that more consideration must be given to farmland and forestland at risk.

**Jason E. Bowsza, First Selectman, Town of East Windsor**: Selectman Bowsza expressed support for this bill, noting that East Windsor holds more than 25% of solar projects in the state. Selectman Bowsza raised concerns around fire safety, noise pollution, destruction of farmland, and impact on residents. He strongly supports Section 9, and the increased control that would be given to communities that already host 100MW. Selectman Bowsza recommended several amendments, which would require more public participation, and specific ways to address the current issues with solar farms in these communities.

**Lisa Bress, Former Deputy Mayor of Windsor**: Former Deputy Mayor Bress expressed support for this bill due to the increase in fairness and transparency that it would provide municipalities. She cited specific issues with the current system including a lack of advanced notice for residents about solar projects, difficulty for all members of the public regardless of education to understand the subject matter being discussed in CSC meetings, and that applicants are advantaged because they have resources such as legal counsel.

**Bill Buckbee, State Representative, Connecticut General Assembly**: Representative Buckbee expressed support for this bill, noting that the citing council needs to be more balanced, and each project should have a voting member from within the effected community.

**Laurie Burstein, First Selectman, Town of Ellington**: Selectman Burstein expressed support for this bill, explaining that CSC can currently approve projects without adhering to the municipal Plan of Conservation and Economic Development and local zoning regulations. She specifically supports Section 9 to improve upon the current lack of fairness in the process. She expressed concerns that solar projects target important and protected farmland, which this bill would help to prevent.

**Brian Connor, Director of Public Policy, Connecticut Conference of Municipalities:** Mr. Connor expressed support for this bill and explained that the current siting process overlooks local and regional land-use priorities. He expressed specific concerns about the inequitable distribution of energy infrastructure, and the loss of agricultural and environmental resources. Mr. Connor supports Section 9 because it enables municipalities that already have solar projects in their communities to have a voice which will address regional inequities. He emphasized that this bill would support greater community engagement.

**Christina Dahl, Co-Founder, East Windsor Residents for Responsible Solar:** Ms. Dahl expressed support for this bill because it would increase accessibility for residents to share their opinions about projects taking place in their communities. Ms. Dahl shared her experience with CSC hearings, which she found inaccessible for people without legal representation. Ms. Dahl expressed that developers seem favored since they do have resources such as legal counsel. Ms. Dahl cited a public hearing where the public provided 2200 signatures and over 100 letters disapproving of a project that was still approved by the council. She expressed that this bill would provide responsible and equitable solar planning. She did suggest an amendment to add legal resources or guidance for residents to prevent inequity. She also recommended to define "abutter" in the bill, and to add DoAg input into this bill due to the discussion of agricultural land use.

**Jamie Foster, State Representative, Connecticut General Assembly:** Representative Foster expressed support for this bill due to the focus on equity, transparency, and responsibility for CSC processes. She expressed that East Windsor hosts almost 30% of the state's solar projects which is more than any single town in New England. Representative Foster noted that these solar farms place a strain on local land-use planning, infrastructure, and economic stability. Representative Foster explained that Section 9 will safeguard communities who already have contributed to solar development and strengthens local representation.

**Matthew Hart, Executive Director, Capitol Region Council of Governments:** Mr. Hart expressed support for this bill due to his organization's interest in ensuring state level decision making considers local and regional impacts. CRCG represents 38 municipalities in the Hartford region. Mr. Hart expressed that there is a disproportionate impact on certain communities which raises concerns about farmland loss and environmental impacts. Mr. Hart supports Section 9 of this bill which will help distribute infrastructure more equitably, reduce conflicts with local land and use priorities, and improve public trust in siting. He noted that this bill would support regional representation and coordination, enhance transparency, local engagement, and municipal input.

#### **NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

**Paul Amarone, Senior Policy Director for Job Growth and Manufacturing, Connecticut Business and Industry Association (CBIA):** Mr. Amarone expressed opposition for this bill. Mr. Amarone noted that increased barriers for energy projects could increase already high energy costs, creating a more hostile business climate. He expressed concerns that complicating the application process for projects could delay infrastructure construction that would support grid reliability and economic growth. Mr. Amarone suggested that adding more authority for municipal bodies regarding the CSC could detract from consistency in decisions made across the state.

**Elizabeth Gara, Executive Director, Connecticut Water Works Association:** Ms. Gara opposed this bill, specifically citing Section 6. She expressed that deleting "...as such terms are defined in section 16-1" could add unnecessary costs to water bills. Ms. Gara noted that water bills are already subject to regulation on a local level and remain relatively low.

**Francis Pullaro, President, RENEW Northeast:** Mr. Pullaro expressed opposition for this bill, noting specific concerns regarding Lines 808-813. He explained that granting municipalities a veto over the permitting of solar projects is unnecessary because solar projects are already held to a higher standard than fossil fuel power plants and have additional permit requirements from DEEP. He cited Public Act 23-106 which was vetoed by the Governor because applicants already must formally consult with municipalities, and the council is required to evaluate the project impartially.

**Kathleen M. Shanley, Manager of Transmission Siting, Eversource Energy:** Ms. Shanley submitted opposition for this bill, citing specific sections of concern. She expressed concerns about the council's ability to manage and advance its already challenging caseload with the added requirements. She pointed out other specific instances where roles and positions suggested in this bill need to be further defined for clarity. Ms. Shanley also noted that some of the amendments in this bill do not fit under the council's legislative purpose, such as the requirement to provide data for the preceding two years of earned and authorized returns on equity. Ms. Shanley expressed that some amendments are also unnecessary because they are already a standard of the council such as granting party status to OCC and requiring the applicant to reimburse expenses. Ms. Shanley also noted concerns about the proposal to use the Systems Benefit Charge to fund new staffing at OCC because these roles do not fit into the intended use for the SBC. Lastly, Ms. Shanley pointed out that Section 9 would convert the council's statutory role by opening the balanced, evidence-based review process to a municipal veto.

**Kimberly Shores:** Ms. Shores expressed opposition to this bill as an Ellington resident. Ms. Shores described that her family is working with a solar company to use 45 acres of their property for a solar project. Ms. Shores explained that the town should not be able to veto this project, because she and her family are working directly with this company and want to proceed. Because of the nature of her property, Ms. Shores explained that this project would not impact neighbors, wildlife, traffic, or the school system.

**John Vamos, VP of State Government Relations, United Illuminating:** Mr. Vamos expressed opposition for this bill because it could impede upon good utility practice and transmission reliability. Mr. Vamos explained that this bill would violate the division of authority between state and federal regulators established in the Federal Power Act, and that it intrudes upon FERC's exclusive jurisdiction. Further, Mr. Vamos noted concerns that the CSC would be able to alter approved certificates at any time after their issuance. Mr. Vamos described that this bill would prevent the recovery of permitting expenses, and expressed concerns that it would elevate DEEP and PURA appointees above other committee members, harming the balance of the committee.

**Reported by: Mariah Leslie**

**Date: 4/1/2026**