

TOWN OF BETHLEHEM



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Pamela Monroe
Administrator
Site Evaluation Committee

RE: SEC Docket No. 2015-06
Comments: Municipal Groupings in the Order
Of Motions To Intervene of March 18, 2016.

Dear Ms. Monroe, Mr. Honigberg and Members of the SEC,

We are requesting a reconsideration of the Municipal Grouping of Bethlehem with the Towns of Pittsburgh, Clarksville, Stewartstown, Colebrook, Northumberland, Dalton, Whitefield, and Littleton. The factors we are asking to be reconsidered are the distance and large size of the grouping. The farthest Towns of Pittsburgh and Clarksville are over 60 miles away with a travel time of at least one and a half hours. As most Board members in northern towns work, this amount of time and travel will be a hardship that interferes with adequate collaboration. It is our understanding that at least one Town has legal representation which means we would have to incur large legal fees to connect or interact with that attorney. We feel that Towns such as Dalton and Whitefield do not have the same set of circumstances that Bethlehem faces. Such a grouping would make it difficult, if not impossible, for municipalities to present their views on the orderly development of their regions and for the SEC to give due consideration to the views of municipal governing bodies under RSA 612-H:16, IV (b).

We understand that on the surface many of these Towns look similar but that is the fallacy of viewing the North Country as all being the same. Bethlehem is unique in that we are scheduled to have above ground lines as well as underground lines along with a transition station.

For these reasons we request that you reconsider the designation of our Municipal Grouping to allow for Bethlehem to address the unique and specific areas that will be impacted as a single group consisting of the Bethlehem Select Board, Bethlehem Planning Board, and Bethlehem Conservation Commission.

Bethlehem sits at an elevation of 1426 feet. Our boundaries contain several of the famous 4000 footer mountains with two mountains within our Town, both of which are over 2000 feet. This results in an aerial view of these towers as well as roadside views. This would not have been obvious to you on your site tour as you stopped in two spots in Bethlehem, both of which you viewed from inside your bus at ground level and not from an elevated position.

Additionally, the eastern part of our Town sits in the White Mountain National Forest which absorbs 30,420 acres of the Town of Bethlehem. There are numerous other conserved lands for a total of 1829.32 acres including a State of NH Fire Academy Training Facility. We have a 61 acre landfill when at capacity will be over 1400 feet high. Now we face the possibility of a large amount of acreage being used for high steel towers that will dominate the landscape on the western part of Town.

Unlike our fellow group Towns we have Route 302, a major east west road as our entrance into and through Bethlehem. The proposed Transition Station #5 will sit beside this roadway and will be sited at the western end of a possible development of the Baker Brook Resort. It is unsure if this project will continue until the issue of Northern Pass has been resolved. This could have a potentially devastating economic impact for Bethlehem.

We do not believe any of the other Towns in the Grouping assigned to us has these specific conditions or impacts.

Our space for development will be even more compressed if the Baker Brook development does not continue due to the location of these towers and substation. It is very doubtful that any other businesses or home owners would desire to build or invest in this area of Town.

We are limited on our eastern end and this will limit any development on the western side of Town. It appears that Bethlehem will be adversely affected by the presence of State, Federal, and now Private Enterprise co-opting a large portion of our Town.

It is also our understanding that the transition station will have to be surrounded by fencing. This implies that the public should not be near this structure and contributes to the fact that not enough research has been done on the safety of high power lines. So we now have cause to be concerned for environmental/health impact to our citizens.

We have a fiduciary duty to the Town to conduct the Town's business in a responsible way. We believe that the Northern Pass Project will dramatically reduce our ability to fulfill this responsibility, especially if our voice is silenced by drowning us out in a large group. For Bethlehem to remain a vibrant community and to move forward with economic growth we need to have a voice in how outside projects affect the nature and wellbeing of the Town.

Thank you for your consideration of this petition for individual intervener status for the Town of Bethlehem.

Respectfully submitted,


Bethlehem Board of Selectmen