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Joint Application of Northern Pass Transmission, LLC
and Public Service Company of New Hampshire
d/b/a Eversource Energy for a Certificate of Site and Facility

Pre-filed testimony of David Van Houten

Q: Please state your name.

A: David Van Houten

Q: What is your interest in the Northern Pass proposal?

A: I live at 649 Cherry Valley Rd. in Bethlehem. The proposed route crosses my property, and I am concerned that the presence of an industrial-scale transmission line on my land would lower the real estate value and have a negative impact on my quality of life.

Q: Do you believe that others share your view that the proposed transmission lines will adversely affect your property?

A: Yes. There are many citizens throughout the state voicing their concern about this. In fact, The NH Legislature states the problem very clearly in a bill enacted earlier this year. HB626-FN-A was signed into law by the Governor on 6/9/2016. The Statement of Purpose of this bill says "...At the same time, as the state's citizens have become more aware of the value, to themselves and others, of New Hampshire's scenic natural landscapes, clean air, and unspoiled environment, it has become increasingly difficult to site and develop large-scale above-ground energy transmission lines from lower-cost neighboring regions. Such projects often face unacceptably high development costs, regulatory delays, and public opposition resulting from their potential adverse impacts on the state's most scenic natural landscapes, the value of adjoining and nearby private properties, and the comfort, health, and safety of adjacent homeowners. ..."

Q: The Applicant has submitted a report by Dr. James Chalmers which concludes that this proposal would not impact real estate values along the route. Do you agree with his conclusions?

A: No. This report did not analyze the impact of transmission line projects on property values. It was simply an accounting of sale prices. Several aspects of real estate value were omitted, for example:

- > Properties that did not sell
- > Second-home market
- > Commercial properties such as ski resorts, hotels, motels
- > Discreet regions of N.H. (North Country is nothing like the Seacoast)
- > Homeowners (and real estate market) held hostage due to uncertainty about Northern Pass

> Property values other than money

Also, there was no peer review of this report.

It should be pointed out that Dr. Chalmers was interviewed for a NHPR story in 2012. He stated that such towers are “not an asset” and he wouldn't want them in his backyard.

Q: How does any of this affect you?

A: Bethlehem is located in the White Mountains. This is a unique part of the world, cherished by many for its scenic attributes and low-key pace of life. Because of this, any development that would degrade the bucolic aspects of a property would render it less attractive to potential buyers. In my case, the view from the house may be affected, and the vista from the corridor would change dramatically. The existing poles are lower than the trees; those proposed would be higher.

In some atmospheric conditions, these lines can hum loudly. Our place is quiet most of the time, and any noise intrusion would be noticed.

Also, our property is located not far from a proposed transition station, which we would drive by almost daily. The scene there, for now, is of a ranch house on one side of the road, and a pond on the other. The transition installation that is planned for this location would be a large industrial eyesore.

I should mention that questions about EMF radiation come up relative to large power lines, and public perception that this is a hazard affects a prospective buyer's attitude toward a property.

Q: Do you have other concerns about property value?

A: Yes. The real estate discussion has focused on the sale price of a property. At the Technical Session on September 19, I asked James Chalmers this question:

“Most of the homes along the proposed route are not for sale and are inhabited by people who hope to live in them for decades. They have value to their owners that cannot be defined in terms of dollars or marketability. This value is more aptly described by terms like character, quiet enjoyment, natural environment, etc. Where is your assessment of the proposed project's potential impact on these values?”

Dr. Chalmers replied that he was not asked to evaluate this, and that it was an issue that the SEC would have to explore.

Site 301.16 states: “In determining whether a proposed energy facility will serve the public interest, the committee shall consider: ... (b) Private property”. There is nothing here restricting the committee's assessment to monetary value. Most of us are motivated by a concern for the quality of life at our homes. Some impacts of this proposal would be immediate, such as noise heard from the yard or towers looming over homes. Other impacts are broader in scope, and affect the lives of all residents and visitors, such as tall towers encroaching upon views from homesteads, byways, rivers, lakes, hiking trails, etc. The landscape is an important attribute to most of us who live in the North Country, and a project which proposes to change it from a rural to an industrial landscape on the scale of Northern Pass is at odds with the people who own and live on this land.

Q: Do you have any other concerns about the Northern Pass?

A: Yes. There has been very little attention paid to the staging areas, laydown areas, and roads that would be required if this project were to be built as proposed. In addition, the construction traffic would impose upon our quiet enjoyment of our property and safe travel on rural roads.

My reading of the application tells me that staging and laydown areas would be sited away from the power line corridor itself in order to allow for flexibility of movement when doing the work. If suitable areas are not available, new land clearing and road building would take place. These activities would have their own impacts on the natural environment of the region and add considerably to the scope of the project.

On page 15 of the Pre-filed Direct Testimony of John Kayser, this statement appears: "NPT requests that the Committee delegate approval authority, to the extent approval may be necessary, for all construction laydown yards and temporary storage areas to the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services ("DES")." It is my opinion that this request should be denied. The cumulative impact of these areas would be significant, and some of the issues that arise are beyond the purview of NH DES. Disruption of wildlife habitat and changing land use come to mind. This must be considered as an integral part of the total project.

Q: What about new roads?

A: Representatives of Northern Pass conducted a site visit with me on my property in June 2016. Brian Bosse stated that in general, construction access was planned to be from where the existing corridor crosses public roads. It is just over one mile from my land to Rte 302 on the corridor, with no other public roads offering access. Therefore a new road would have to be constructed for that distance along the corridor to provide access for construction equipment. The equipment involved in this project would be very heavy, and the new road would need to be robust. There is no road on the corridor at present. In fact, the corridor proceeds North from Rte 302 for 4 miles until it crosses the Ammonoosuc River, with no public road crossing for that entire distance. So the new road from Rte 302 would need to extend that far, or Northern Pass would have to make a deal with an abutting landowner to provide access. My opinion is that some of these deals have already been made, and land clearing and road building are underway now.

I am concerned that the new roads would bring a significant change in the use of the corridor by motorized vehicles. For now, there is hardly any OHRV traffic on the corridor, and it is not a source of noise or disruption. The new roads would be inviting to joy-riders, and that is not something we would welcome on our land.

Q: Do you have anything else to add?

A: Of course. My opinion is that the Northern Pass has had an awful impact on the state of New Hampshire and its citizens since it was proposed 6 years ago, and the application should be withdrawn. In the event that the Site Evaluation Committee and the people of NH are compelled to follow this process to its conclusion, I believe that the only reasonable course for the committee would be to deny the application.

Q: Does this end your testimony?

A: Yes.

