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**Attachments:** [Testimony on Pleasant Prairie Solar Energy Center - Case Number 20-1679-EL-BGN - Cathy Cowan Becker .docx](#)

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Hello Ohio Power Siting Board,

Please find attached the testimony that I provided at last night's hearing on the Pleasant Prairie Solar Energy Center. The remarks I made were a shorter version of this written testimony on behalf of Ready for 100 Ohio and Simply Living.

Just let me know if you have any questions or need any other information.

Thank you,

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**Testimony on Pleasant Prairie Solar Energy Center  
Case Number 20-1679-EL-BGN**

**By Cathy Cowan Becker  
Chair, Ready for 100 Ohio  
Executive Director, Simply Living**

Chair French and members of the Ohio Power Siting Board,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you tonight. My name is Cathy Cowan Becker, and I am chair of Ready for 100 Ohio, a campaign of the Sierra Club to ask cities to commit to 100% renewable energy. I am also executive director of Simply Living, a Columbus nonprofit that promotes community sustainability, environmental awareness, and our local economy.

I am also a member of Westland Area Commission in Columbus, the elected representative for Columbus Ward 79 to the Franklin County Democratic Party Central Committee, and a member of the sustainability committees for both Columbus and Grove City.

That's a lot of titles, but at heart I am a climate activist, as well as a neighbor of the Pleasant Prairie Solar Energy Center – and in every one of these capacities, I strongly support this project.

As a climate activist, I am used to reading bad news about storms, droughts, floods, heat waves, and melting ice. But with increasing frequency a climate story crosses my desk that turns my stomach. Last week was such a story – of over 1 billion sea creatures – mussels, clams, sea stars, and snails – literally [cooked to death](#) by the heatwave in the Pacific Northwest.

I bring this up because the Big Darby Creek, near where the Pleasant Prairie Solar Energy Center is proposed to go, is home to 44 species of mussels, some of which are rare or endangered. During my local conversations about how the Pleasant Prairie project might affect these species, I have very rarely heard anyone mention the effects of the climate crisis.

Yet if left unchecked, the climate crisis will do much more damage to Darby Creek and all the creatures that live in it than this solar project could ever do – and I hope that you as members of the Ohio Power Siting Board will keep in mind urgency of the climate crisis when making your decisions about renewable energy projects in Ohio, the sixth-highest carbon-emitting state.

The science is clear on the causes of the climate crisis – carbon emissions chiefly from burning fossil fuels – and what we must do to address it – quickly moving away from coal, oil, and gas to renewable sources of energy such as solar, wind, and geothermal to avoid its worst effects.

I became a climate activist because of the enormous gulf between what the science says must be done and what we are actually doing to safeguard our health and environment, and that of future generations, and prevent mass extinctions of other creatures who we share this planet with.

In 2017 I founded the Columbus Ready for 100 campaign. With the help of other incredible volunteers, we organized and led dozens of events such as speakers, panels, and film discussions; tabled at numerous community festivals; held neighborhood dialogues; and collected over 5,000 signatures on our petition asking the city of Columbus to commit to 100% renewable energy.

This work inspired me to seek a dual master's in public administration and environment and natural resources at Ohio State University, where I wrote my capstone paper on how cities are moving to 100% renewable energy. Almost 200 cities across the country have made this commitment, including Cincinnati, Cleveland, Lakewood, South Euclid, and Dayton in Ohio.

One major step we see for cities in Ohio to reach this goal is electric aggregation for 100% renewable energy. We have been talking to Columbus city leaders about this, as well as leaders in Grove City, Bexley, Hilliard, Delaware, Grandview Heights, Dayton, Toledo, and more.

Cincinnati has long been aggregated for 100% renewable energy, and Worthington took this step in 2018. But these cities began their aggregation programs by buying renewable energy certificates, or RECs. That means for every megawatt of energy used by residents and businesses in their aggregation program, these cities purchased a megawatt of renewable energy generated somewhere else. We didn't have enough renewable energy in Ohio for these cities to buy here.

RECs are not bad – they support the renewable energy industry overall, and help to bring down the price for everyone. But they are not the same as generating and purchasing renewable energy locally. They send our money out of state instead of investing it in our local community.

For that reason, Ready for 100 asked the city of Columbus to not just pursue electric aggregation for 100% renewable energy, but also commit to seeking **local** sources of renewable energy, through construction of renewable energy projects here in Ohio, preferably in Central Ohio.

And that's exactly what the city of Columbus – as well as Grove City – did. Last year both cities put electric aggregation for 100% renewable energy on their ballots, where both initiatives passed by a landslide – Columbus by 76% and Grove City by 63%. Both initiatives commit these cities to powering their residents and businesses with 100% renewable energy generated here in Ohio.

This gets me to the Pleasant Prairie Solar Energy Center. Partly as a result of the Columbus and Grove City aggregation initiatives passing with such flying colors, several dozen solar projects have been proposed across Ohio. While we want these projects to adopt strong environmental practices, we also recognize solar energy is a critical part of Ohio's clean energy future.

Because of Pleasant Prairie's proposed location near Battelle Darby Creek Metro Park, which I visit at least weekly, I wanted to make sure the project developer, Invenergy, is adhering to strong environmental practices. Through several conversations with project staff, I learned that Invenergy plans to:

- Plant diverse native vegetation including pollinator mixes throughout the project site
- Reduce the use of pesticides and fertilizers
- Use wildlife friendly fencing
- Avoid all permanent impacts to wetlands
- Increase setbacks and screening
- Use anti-glare coating on solar panels
- Leave the land in as good or better condition than it started in decommissioning the project.

I was impressed with the extent of public outreach Invenergy has done to hundreds of neighbors in the project area, through letters, phone calls, and door knocking. They have also met with numerous local officials, government agencies, and community groups. Because of input from these conversations, Invenergy has listened and changed some of its project plans.

Many people do not understand the rigor of the Ohio Power Siting Board process. For those who have not seen Invenenergy's application for the Pleasant Prairie solar project, I urge them to go to the case documents. There they will find an application consisting of thousands of pages in 25 parts covering all manner of environmental, economic, and social considerations. On top of that, Invenenergy has submitted hundreds more pages of information requested by the board. Anyone who has questions about the Pleasant Prairie solar project can find answers in these documents.

The environmental benefits of the Pleasant Prairie Solar Energy Center are clear. If approved, this 250 MW solar project would generate enough electricity to supply almost 50,000 homes, reducing carbon emissions in Central Ohio equivalent to taking over 54,000 gas cars off the road.

According to EPA calculations, moving to 250 MW of clean energy would lower pollution in Central Ohio enough to cut health-care costs by \$75 million, and result in 8 fewer deaths from air pollution, 233 fewer cases of breathing illness, and 2,313 fewer missed school days.

Besides the benefits to our environment, the Pleasant Prairie solar project is also an investment in our local economy. It would create 800 construction jobs, and four full-time operations and maintenance jobs. Project developers would also pay millions of dollars in taxes to county and township governments each year to support our schools, libraries, and emergency services.

For all these reasons, as a neighbor of the project, as a climate activist, and as all the titles I mentioned at the beginning of my testimony, I strongly support the Pleasant Prairie Solar Energy Center, and urge you as members of the Ohio Power Siting Board to approve it.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify, and I would be happy to answer any questions.

Submitted by  
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Summary: Public Comment of Cathy Cowan Becker, Executive Director of Simply Living, via website, electronically filed by Docketing Staff on behalf of Docketing