

Testimony in Support of LD 1708
Act To Create the Pine Tree Power Company, a Nonprofit Utility
Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology
May 20, 2021

Senator Lawrence, Representative Berry, members of the Joint Committee, my name is Victor Langelo. I live in Topsham and am a member of the town's Energy Committee. Our town has embraced the transition to renewable energy by purchasing solar power for our 85% of our municipal power needs. In addition we have adapted our zoning ordinance to make it possible for solar as a primary use on most parcels with restrictions for important habitat. We now have two approved and one pending solar array projects which will provide more than enough power for all the homes and businesses in town. Of course most of that power is generated March through October. When most of the town has converted to heat pumps, the peak demand may very well be in the coldest days of winter.

In the next few years, the power generated in our town will flow to neighboring towns. But think about what happens when the distributed generation capacity approaches 100% of the demand everywhere. The existing transmission and distribution system isn't going to work. A significant amount of long term storage will be needed to accommodate the disparities between supply and demand. There will be tens of thousands of generators and storage systems throughout the system. This is a major disruption to the business model of all existing electric utilities. Investor owned utilities are focused on short term returns to shareholders. We have all witnessed once mighty corporations fail to adapt in times of major change. GM needed to be bailed out by the US Treasury. Do we want to follow that same road here in Maine?

I and many of my neighbors in Topsham experience far more outages and of longer duration each passing year. Reliability and resiliency can't be achieved by simply improving the existing large point source infrastructure. Resiliency can be achieved either by redundancy or by autonomy. The population of Maine is sparse requiring a high infrastructure to population ratio. Redundancy would increase that to unacceptable levels. Autonomy with micro grids can achieve resiliency with lower overall cost. But again it requires a radically different transmission and distribution system.

We have the power to regulate the utilities to make the needed changes. This seems unlikely to work given the past lack of will among the legislature for significant regulatory reform. In addition all the investments needed will be financed with a guaranteed return to investors that far exceeds municipal owned utility borrowing costs. Any astute observer would have predicted the needed changes years ago. Yet, neither IOU in Maine has made even the smallest modernizations to their systems to date.

This state can't effectively change the management decisions of a multinational corporation. The people of Maine can set our own priorities when we own the utility. With Pine Tree Power we have the best chance of meeting the climate goals set out by the current administration and the reliability demanded by the majority of Maine people. I urge you to support this legislation and advance it with an ought to pass report.

Thanks for your time and attention.

Victor Langelo