



Engagement in Local Renewable Energy Decisions:

Lessons learned and still learning

NCEP, October 29, 2024

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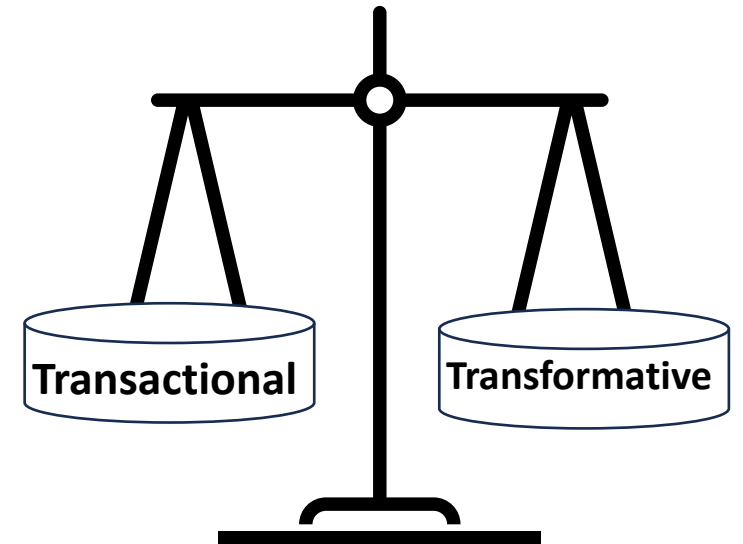
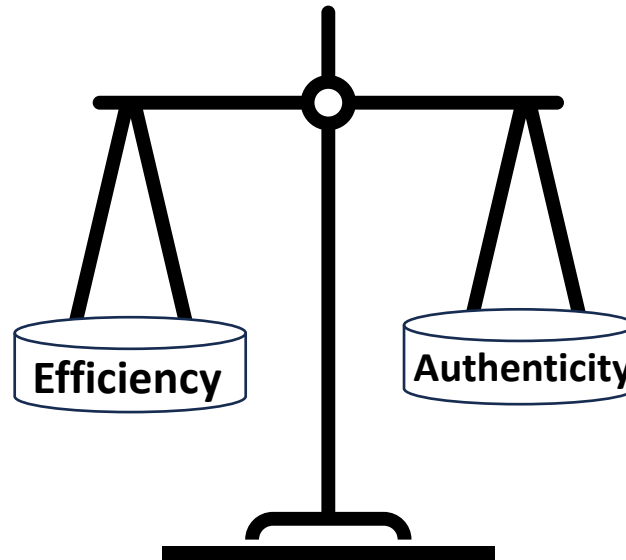
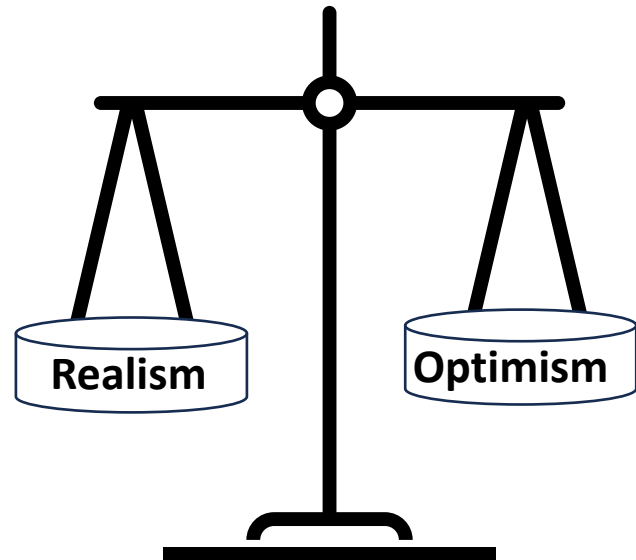
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Engagement: purpose and balance





Mason County, 2011

Local zoning- Planning Commission
(12+public hearings/public meetings)

Agricultural setting: orchards, row crops
Lake Michigan nearby (high amenity
viewsheds)

Major state-utility provider as
developer/owner
100 MW wind project

Limited Lease structure compensates only
landowners within small radius of a wind
turbine (about 800 feet)

Sustained organized opposition





Ongoing Research

Landowner Perceptions of Wind Energy

Fairness in the planning process

- Those who perceived a just process, perceived more benefits
- Those perceiving unjust process perceived greater impacts

Mills, S., et al, 2019

Organized Opposition: Large Scale Solar (LSS)

- Organized opposition exerts greater influence at public hearings
 - Comprised mostly of nearby neighbors with negative perceptions of LSS
- Lease holders, environmentalists, tend to be less organized

Crawford, et al., 2022

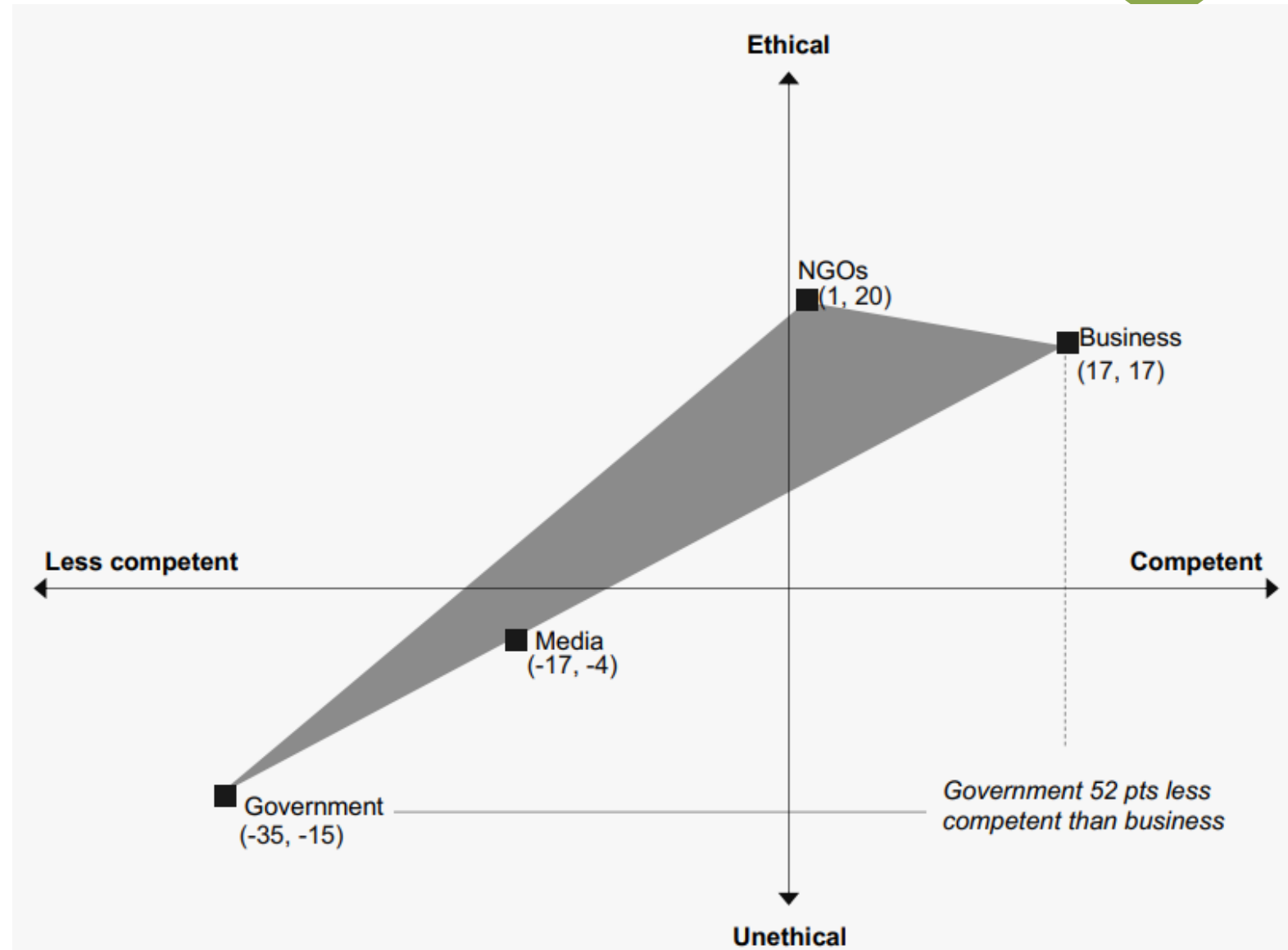


Credit: M. Reilly



Trust

- Government seen as less competent than NGO's, Business (2024)
- Who can be a trusted partner or facilitator for meaningful engagement?
 - Not the applicant?
 - Not the government?
 - Then who?





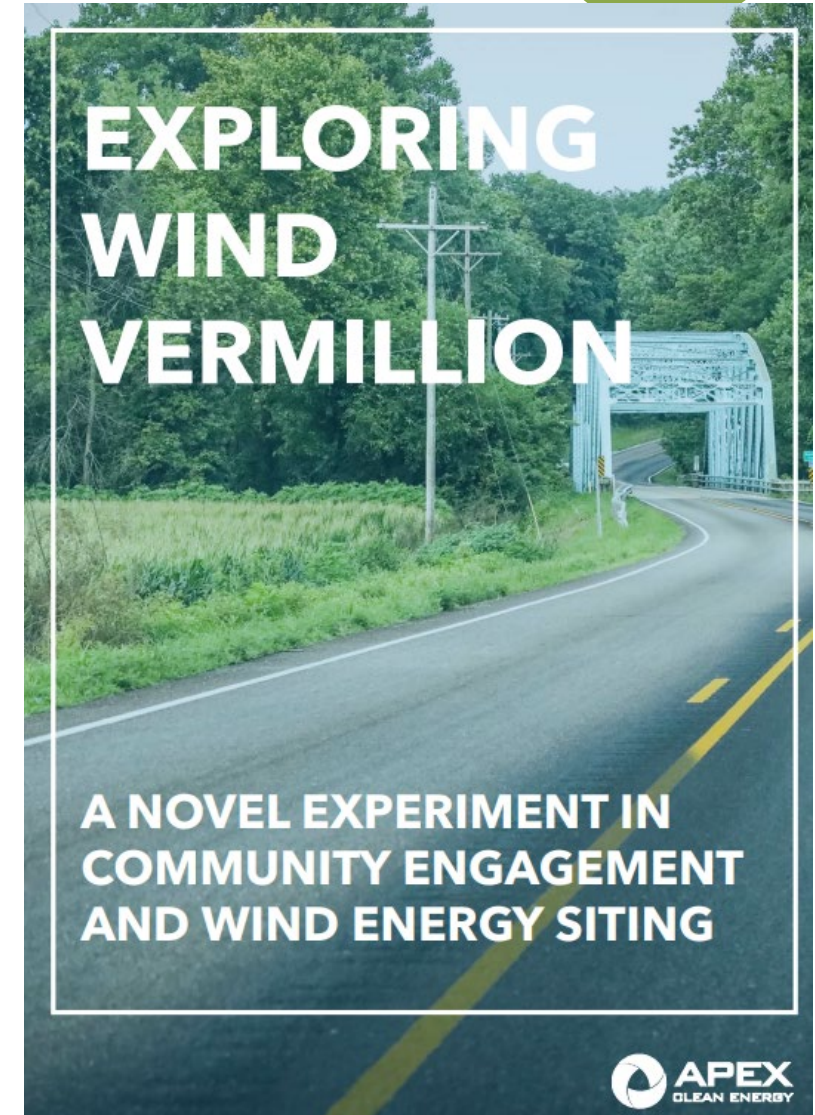
Developer as convenor?

Exploring Wind Vermillion (2023)

- Developer, Apex Energy, attempts to engage in Indiana community with shared decision making
 - Partners with MIT/Harvard Consensus Building Institute and Keystone Policy Center
- Distrust (for a variety of reasons) shadows the effort

Trusted sources (p. 68) (N=25):

1. Technical experts from university, or other independent org.,
2. First person accounts (people living next to)
3. Local government, Farm Bureau, local committee
4. State/federal agencies
5. Advocacy groups
6. Websites/Social Media (lowest)





Osceola County, Michigan

Community Centered Solar Design: Lawrence Berkely National Labs,
Michigan State University, University of Michigan

- 5 Extension Pilot Initiatives (MI, WI, PA, IA, MD) 2024

Project Overview

- Jan-May 2024
- **Local Project Team** (integral to project)
 - How do we PLAN for large-scale solar here?
 - Process and timeline
 - Design outcomes of a successful project





Local Project Team:

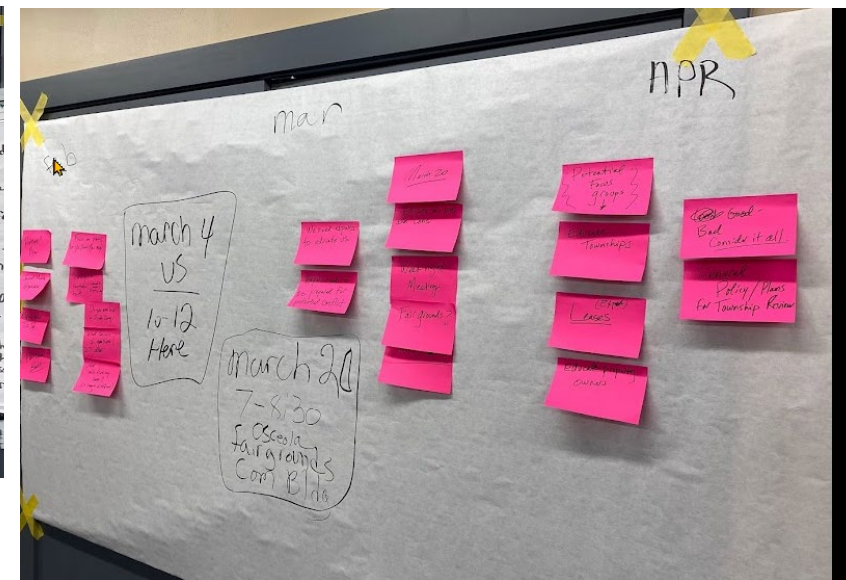
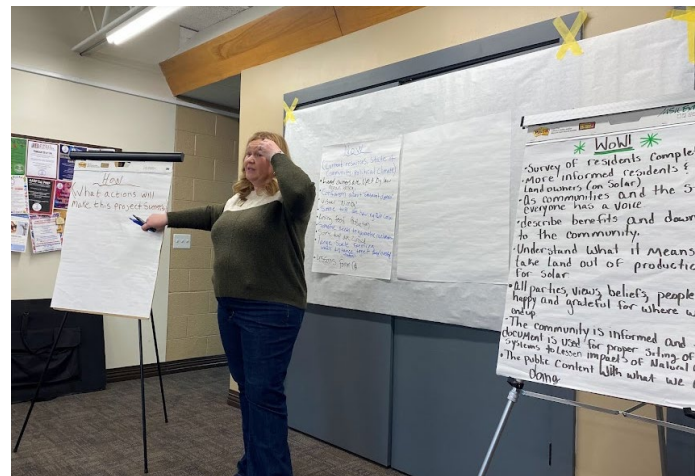
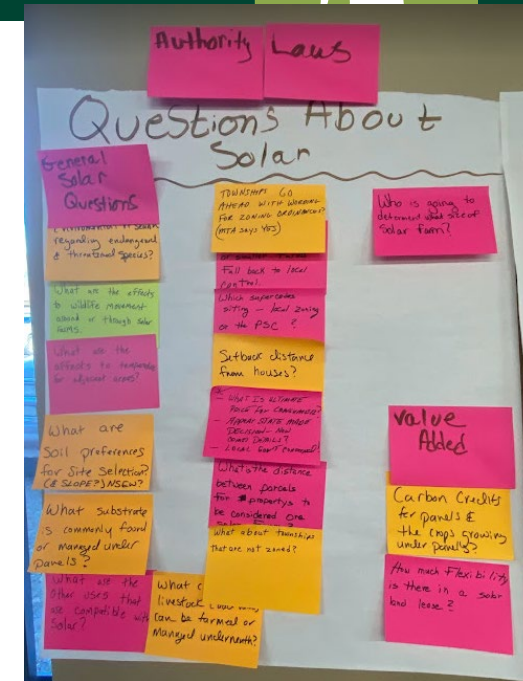
- County and Township Officials (4)
- NRCS Agent
- County Planning Commission (3)
- Retired MSU Extension (2)
- Farmer/Farm Bureau (people had multiple roles)

MSU Extension Team:

- Planner
- Facilitator
- GIS technician
- Local admin. Support

December 2023 to May 2024

5 team meetings (with MSUE)
2 Townhall meetings





Process Overview: Osceola County

Town Hall Meeting # 1

The good, the bad, and the trade-offs for large scale solar

TOWN HALL MEETING:

the good, the bad, and the trade-offs for large scale solar

with food!



March 20, 2024, 7-8:30 PM
Osceola County Fairgrounds
Community Building
101 Recreation Avenue, Evert, MI

REGISTER TODAY

<https://events.anr.msu.edu/OsceolaSolar/>

Register prior to **3/18/24** to receive a gift valued at \$30 when you attend the meeting.

OUR SPEAKER
Dr. Sarah Mills



Join us to learn more about large scale solar with renewable energy expert Dr. Sarah Mills, University of Michigan.

Community Survey

Identify local perceptions:

- benefits and concerns
- scale/location
- land use preferences



Town Hall #2 Engagement:

Where is large scale solar suitable or unsuitable? What are responsible siting priorities?

TOWNHALL MEETING #2

with food!

Where is large-scale solar suitable or unsuitable in Osceola County?
What is the Community saying? What are your thoughts?



Thursday, April 11, 2024, 7-8:30 PM
Osceola County Fairgrounds
Community Building
101 Recreation Avenue, Evert, MI



REGISTER TODAY

<https://events.anr.msu.edu/SolarPlan>

Register prior to **4/10/24** to receive a gift valued at \$30 when you attend the meeting.





Survey: Benefits/Concerns

What **concerns** do you have about large scale solar in Osceola County?

- Wildlife or other environmental, health, or safety impacts (77%)
- Removal from site at the end of the project (76%)
- Impact to farm production and food sources (76%)
- Visual changes/how solar project looks (51%)
- Energy costs and/or reliability of solar energy(45%)

What are the **potential benefits** of large-scale solar in Osceola County?*

- Effective use of less productive farmland or marginal land (55%)
- Income to farmers and landowners (54%)
- Greater energy independence (41%)
- Reduce greenhouse gas/slow climate change (30%)
- Increased revenue to local units of government (18%)

*60% survey response for this question



Survey: land use/land cover

To what extent do you support or oppose large solar energy projects in these areas?

+	Generally, OPPOSE	NEUTRAL	Generally, SUPPORT
Active farmland	51	21	13
Federal or state land	28	26	30
Power line or road right-of-way	19	33	32
Open lands not currently being farmed*	18	30	38
Less productive agricultural land	22	23	39
Areas hidden by trees or buffered by distance	16	32	36
Former landfill, sand/gravel quarry, brownfield	3	28	54



Town Hall #2: Responsible Siting Priorities (sample)

- Mitigate impacts on habitat, birds, deer movement, migration*
- Decommissioning-financial guarantees*
- Require pollinator plantings or other ground cover such as forage for sheep grazing
- Reduce noise impacts, setbacks, inverters in center of project*
- Proper inspection, maintenance
- Locate on less productive farmland, marginal land, parking lots, brownfields, sand/gravel pits.
- Wooded buffers, setbacks to mitigate visibility

*relate to potential community priorities for local “workable” ordinance under new MI siting laws



Engagement = authentic interaction, not a specific outcome

Mapping Exercise:

Where are suitable areas for large scale solar in Osceola County?

Mecosta
County

Guantanamo
Bay (Cuba)

Wexford
County

Beijing, China



CCSD: A Guidebook for Hosting Community Conversations about Large Scale Solar (coming soon)

- 1. Define the purpose of your community conversation**
- 2. Assess the status of large scale solar in the community and policy environment**
- 3. Establish a local advisory board**
- 4. Create an agenda for the conversation(s)**
- 5. Select an appropriate venue and date/time**
- 6. Engage in outreach and marketing**
- 7. Converse**



	Mason County (2011)	Osceola County (2024)	Notes
Primarily government required process	✓		
Primarily planning		✓	Time intensive, community led, long term
University-Community partnership		✓	Funding available
Public meetings or hearings	✓		Formal meeting process
Townhall style, food, (interactive)		✓	Local process input, facilitator support
Project application	✓		Standards-based decision
Organized opposition	✓	✓	Time, conflict
Legal challenge	✓		Time, expense, conflict



References

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Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
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