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As the Anti-Birch Solar group met Tuesday evening, both in person and virtually, organizer Jim Thompson indicated the group could be leading a legislative effort with statewide implications.

He and several group members have cited concerns with population density and the environmental impact of Lightsource Bp's 300 megawatt project. Property values also remain a chief concern among local residents. He said area elected officials are taken completely out of the approval process and that everything is reviewed by the state of Ohio.

"That's not the way it should be," Thompson said. "We will be presenting in a couple of weeks with Rep. Bob Cupp and Sen. Matt Huffman, regulations we feel Ohio desperately needs."

He was especially concerned with projects "impacting a township's vision without that township's consent."

Thompson clarified after the meeting that proposed legislation would specifically give that approval power to local townships. Thompson said under the proposal, after a referendum through the township, the developer could proceed with the Ohio Power Siting Board. He said local zoning and regulations should apply.

That meeting with the legislators will take place at Apollo Career Center from 1-3 p.m. on Feb. 6. Huffman and Cupp, as well as Preble County Commissioner Rachael Vonderhaar and renewable energy activist Julie Johnson will speak at the public meeting. Due to COVID-19 the meeting is limited to 100 attendees but will be accessible via Zoom.

In 2019 companion bills for similar legislation regarding wind energy had been introduced by then Ohio House Rep. and now Sen. Bill Reineke and Sen. Rob McColley.

"These items should appear on and be passed by a local referendum. We should all have a say in these types of developments," Thompson said.

He said the Ohio Power Siting board was ill equipped to handle the approval process for an influx in solar projects.

He said nationwide 6,000 solar farms are in construction phase and 3,800 more are in development.

Local power grid manager PJM shows multiple studies for solar entities in Auglaize and Allen counties that could be implemented over the next few years, including a solar battery project south of Wapakoneta near St. Johns.

"We are at a unique point in time where we can come together as a community to iron out things and make sure we as a community know what's going to happen. Now is the time to do it before these projects get out of hand," Thompson said.

In reviewing responses from local commissioners, Thompson said Allen County commissioners wanted to wait to see whether a project application is submitted before commenting, whereas Auglaize County commissioners have been more vocal about opposition to a Payment in Lieu of Taxes program as long-term job creation projections are minimal.

He also assured members that Lightsource is still in the pre-application process,

meaning the proposed 300 megawatt project in the Shawnee area isn't a done deal. Thompson also said farmers are being offered between \$1,000 and \$1,500 per acre per year in land lease agreements over multiple decades and called that amount "hard to ignore."