

Responsible Energy Transition Must Include Responsible Siting

By Aaron Langlois, Board Member, theACORNS.org

Joe Curtatone's June 15, 2025 guest column, "Battery storage part of path to clean energy in Mass.," makes a passionate case for battery energy storage systems (BESS) as a cornerstone of the Commonwealth's energy future. While we at theACORNS.org fully agree that climate change is real and that energy reform is urgently needed, the piece misses a critical point: environmental progress cannot come at the expense of environmental protection. Clean energy infrastructure must be pursued responsibly—with local input, ecological safeguards, and transparent planning. Unfortunately, the proposed BESS project in Oakham fails to meet those standards.

As a Board Member of the nonprofit Advocates for Conservation of Oakham's Rural Nature & Safety (theACORNS.org), I want to clarify what our community is truly concerned about—and it's not misinformation or fearmongering. It's about location, safety, and ecological accountability.

Let's look at the facts:

- The proposed Oakham BESS site is located within critical watershed protection areas and requires the clear-cutting of several acres of forest—land that currently serves as a carbon sink and wildlife habitat.
- The project, as submitted, failed to fully delineate wetland resource areas—omissions now confirmed by independent environmental review.
- This is a standalone battery facility with no co-located solar or wind source. It is not "storing clean, local energy"—it is storing electricity from an unknown source, including fossil fuel-generated power, and selling it back to the grid at a premium.
- Oakham is a small, rural town with limited emergency response capacity. While modern battery designs have improved, lithium utility-scale battery storage systems still pose serious fire risks, particularly in isolated areas.

Curtatone accuses residents of being manipulated by "well-funded fossil fuel interests." That's not just false—it's insulting. Our movement is entirely grassroots, made up of concerned residents, environmental advocates, and health & safety professionals. We are not opposing BESS because we are against progress. We are opposing this poorly sited project because it threatens what we are trying to preserve: clean water, biodiversity, public safety, and community voice.

We do not dispute that battery storage has a role to play in the clean energy transition. But we reject the narrative that all BESS projects are inherently safe, universally beneficial, or immune to scrutiny. When projects are rushed through rural communities with inadequate environmental review and little local input, it's not just shortsighted—it's dangerous.

In addition, the proposed BESS site lies within an area ranked in the top 2 percentile for wetland connectivity in the entire Commonwealth. These interconnected wetland systems—which function significantly better than isolated wetlands—are essential to our region’s ecological health. They filter our groundwater, provide critical habitat for native wildlife, and act as natural buffers against both drought and flood. To clear-cut and disrupt this land in the name of sustainability is not progress—it’s environmental contradiction.

We call on our state agencies and elected leaders to uphold the full spirit of environmental stewardship—not just in reducing emissions, but in protecting the fragile ecosystems and rural towns that will carry the burden of this infrastructure. Clean energy must be clean in practice, not just in branding.

We welcome honest, science-based dialogue. But labeling legitimate environmental advocacy as “fearmongering” is a disservice to democracy, and it silences the very community engagement Curtatone claims to support.

We are Oakham. We are informed. We are not afraid of clean energy—we just expect it to be done right.

There are other towns across the Commonwealth who are facing the same threat: energy infrastructure that prioritizes profits over people and ecosystems. We must stand together—for our water, our safety, and our right to be heard.