

## Solar Update August 2021

As you know, the Town Board, the Columbia County Board of Supervisors, our State elected officials, Senator Daphne Jordan and Assemblymember Didi Barrett all have gone on record opposing Hecate Energy's proposed industrial-size energy factory that it euphemistically calls the "Shepherd's Run Solar Farm". In so doing, all these elected officials are reflecting the sentiments of approximately 95% of Copakeans who oppose Hecate's proposal because they understand all too well that Shepherd's Run would be no "farm" — it would be an industrial power-plant factory sited in rural Craryville.

What is at risk is the very character of Copake. Not for nothing, Copake's motto is "Land of Rural Charm." As we approach the 200th anniversary of the founding of our town, it is ironic that we are now threatened with the potentially permanent loss of prime agricultural lands, risks to adjacent wetlands, inland waterways, wildlife habitats and gorgeous view sheds — the very things that make Copake Copake — and the very features that have made Copake such a wonderful place to live — the very features that draw thousands of visitors who bicycle, hike, camp, swim, boat, ski and otherwise enjoy Copake's breathtakingly beautiful outdoors while supporting Copake's economy.

We have two fundamental, often repeated objections to Hecate's current proposal: it is much too large for our small rural town, and it is sited in exactly the wrong places; 255 acres "inside the fence", along a county road that is the gateway to the hamlet of Copake and to Copake Lake. It would be directly across the street from the homes of more than a dozen lifelong Copakeans.

In meetings and conversations with Hecate representatives, we've made our objections abundantly clear. We have urged Hecate to scale back its proposal, to relocate it and also to figure out how to effectively shield the power plant's solar arrays, inverters and other factory components with creative landscaping and mature trees — not saplings.

The Shepard's Run controversy is occurring during a time of heightened concern about the impacts of climate change. We all get it. We all know that the dramatic reduction of fossil fuel emissions is everyone's responsibility, including ours. And we've repeatedly urged Hecate to work with us to develop a solar facility proposal that actually is, as some lawn signs proclaim, "Great for Copake, Great for the Climate." To claim that the *current* proposal is "Great for Copake" is simply false to the facts. An honest, accurate sign might read, "Great for a few absentee-landowner lessors, Bad for their neighbors, and Bad for Copake."

We have been told that Hecate has heard us, and is in the process of preparing a revised proposal. But we have not heard from Hecate in several weeks and do not know when we will see a new proposal or when Hecate intends to file a siting application with the Office of Renewable Energy Siting ("ORES"). We still hope that Hecate will show it to be a true community partner; we hope it will present a revised plan that can become a template for expeditiously siting renewable energy facilities in rural communities throughout the State.

In the meantime, there have been a few other developments. In the lawsuit challenging ORES' new regulations brought by Copake (as a lead petitioner) and five other upstate, rural towns (Cambria, Farmersville, Malone, Somerset and Yates), as well as seven non-profit avian interest groups and community grass-roots organizations, petitioners' attorneys

have entered into a stipulation with the State Attorney General's office which requires the State to respond by August 27th. This Article 78 proceeding seeks to invalidate the ORES regulations. Petitioners' attorneys soon will seek an injunction preventing ORES from accepting new siting applications or acting on applications that already have been filed. We should have more to report on this at the September Board meeting.

Another major development is, of course, the soon-to-begin ascension of Lieutenant Governor Kathy Hochul, someone with upstate roots, to the Governorship. We are hopeful that the new Governor will be more sympathetic to balancing the importance of addressing climate with the needs of rural, upstate towns and communities. Supervisor Mettler already has invited the Lieutenant Governor to visit Copake and learn about our concerns.