

January 2021 Solar Update

Richard Wolf, Deputy Town Supervisor

At our December Town Board meeting, I reported that on December 9th, during two “virtual open houses”, Hecate’s project developer, Alex Campbell, had erroneously claimed that Copake was uninterested or unwilling to meet with or work with Hecate.

I responded with a challenge to Hecate: come to the Town and present a “base case” alternative proposal for Shepherd’s Run that works within Copake’s Zoning Law. Show us plans for some smaller, connected facilities that could be shielded from view, honoring Copake’s 10-acre rule, with the understanding that, if Hecate could demonstrate that larger sites could be effectively shielded upon construction — and not in 5 to 15 years — larger facilities might be possible through the Zoning Law’s variance process. Hecate would have nothing to lose by seeing how much capacity it might be able to build by following local laws. It wouldn’t be the full 60 Megawatts contemplated by the current Shepherd’s Run proposal, but it could be significant capacity, and Hecate could bring its capacity on line much sooner than if it sticks with the State siting process.

My pitch to Hecate was simple and direct: if you work with us, we will demonstrate that Copake enthusiastically supports renewable energy. You can prove by your actions what you claim to be true: that Hecate actually does care about Copake and what Shepherds’s Run would do the character of the Copake area. Respect Home Rule by following Copake’s laws. Help Copake to become a leader in championing renewable energy. I concluded by suggesting that together, Copake and Hecate could “do sensible solar”. And if we did, Hecate could then go out and replicate its Copake win-win elsewhere, and in the process help New York to reach its laudable renewable energy goals.

Well...so much for my effectiveness as an advocate for working together. Hecate’s response had been deafening silence until yesterday, when it resumed its inexorable march through the Article 10 State siting process. It filed with the Siting Board a “Notice” that tomorrow, it will file “Proposed Stipulations” which will describe “potential agreements” about the methodology and scope of studies Hecate plans to conduct to assess the likely impacts of a large, utility-scale solar power plant on Craryville, Copake and

the surrounding area. And the Notice once again calls into question the planned size of Shepherd's Run, describing it as "a 60-megawatt solar photovoltaic electric generating facility comprised of solar panels and related components proposed on approximately 900 acres in the Town of Copake." Not the 360 acres Hecate claimed at the December 9th virtual open houses; and certainly not the 280 acres mentioned in a letter last week to the Columbia Paper.

Although the Notice claims the Proposed Stipulations are on the Shepherd's Run website and on the State Siting Board's website, they've not yet been posted on either. Presumably they will appear tomorrow.

The Proposed Stipulations are likely to be extensive and technical. Our solar attorney and environmental engineer will submit comments. The public will have 21 days to comment, after which the Stipulations may be executed.

There's been one other recent development. Posted on the Siting Board's website is a letter from Assembly Member Didi Barrett inviting John Rhodes, Chair of the Siting Board to come to Copake, visit the proposed site, and meet with her and Town officials to better understand the impact the power plant would have on the community. Assembly Member Barrett also sent a letter to each of the other four permanent members of the Siting Board.

We'll let everyone know whether any of the five permanent Siting Board members accepts Didi's invitation,.