

Solar Update
March 2021

As you know, Hecate announced last month that it had reduced the footprint of its proposed Shepherd's Run solar power plant from 500 to 360 acres, and that it had abandoned plans for a battery-storage facility.

Although we are hoping that the footprint will be reduced even more, we have heard nothing further from Hecate.

I want to correct some misinformation that has been circulating recently. Some Hecate supporters have said that Copake is opposed to any solar facility within its borders. This is untrue. For the past several months, the Town Board has consistently stated and restated its position regarding the proposed Shepherd's Run project: we support renewable energy; we understand the need for Copake to do its fair share to help reduce fossil fuel emissions; but Shepherd's Run as presently proposed is too large for our small rural Town. 200,000 solar panels on prime farmland, along the country roads leading into and out of Copake Hamlet and Copake Lake? It's too much.

That's why we've continued to implore Hecate: respect Home Rule and work within Copake's Zoning laws and procedures. Let's together develop a plan that both increases renewable energy capacity, and respects Copake's consistent and effective stewardship of the land within its borders. And to Shepherd's Run's supporters, I say: Don't pretend that fields of solar panels directly across the road

won't drastically reduce the home values — the life savings — of lifelong Copakeans. And don't ignore the certainty that a massive industrial-scale solar plant will inevitably alter Copake's very character.

Many, if not most of you, were among the 230 people who attended Sensible Solar's Zoom meeting on March 3rd, at which was presented a mapping video that showed the current planned location for Shepherd's Run, and its potential impacts on natural resources, the environment and the community. If you haven't seen the video, you should: there's a link at Sensible Solar's website (SensibleSolarny.org).

For now, Hecate continues to move forward through the State's Article 10 procedures. Despite Hecate's protestations to the contrary, we will not be surprised if it moves to the more streamlined Section 94-c. Last month I reported that, as currently written, Section 94-c requires an environmental review pursuant to the State Environmental Quality Review Act — a SEQRA review. This distinguishes it from Article 10, which requires the Siting Board to make express findings and determinations regarding the likely environmental impacts of a project.

But the proposed 2022 State budget includes a provision that would exempt 94-c from a SEQRA review. If this proposal become law, permits for industrial-size solar power plants could be issued without any findings and determinations being made about a project's potential impacts on the environment.

In response to this threat, the Copake Town Board unanimously passed a Resolution insisting that 94-c continue to require full SEQRA review of any renewable energy project seeking site approval or, failing that, that Section 94-c be modified to require the new Office of Renewable Energy Siting to make specific findings and determinations regarding the environmental impacts of any project seeking site approval — as does Article 10.

And here's an update: I am pleased to report that last night, the Columbia County Board of Supervisors adopted a Resolution introduced by Supervisor Mettler, which fully supports Copake's position, insisting on environmental reviews of all large renewable energy project proposals.

For now, however, Hecate is still in Article 10, where the next shoe to drop should be in the next few months when Hecate files a formal application for siting approval with the NYS Siting Board.

As always, we'll keep you posted as developments occur.