

Solar Update

On September 19, the NYS Office of Renewable Energy Siting and Electric Transmission (ORES) wrote to Hecate Energy and informed it that its application for a siting permit to construct a 42-megawatt solar factory in Craryville had been deemed “complete.” The letter noted that state regulations give ORES no more than sixty days to publish for public comment either a draft siting permit or a statement of intent to deny the application. So, no later than mid-November, we will know whether ORES intends to allow Hecate to build Shepherd’s Run on more than 200 acres of mostly prime farmland in Craryville.

Two days ago, our attorney received a copy of an email sent to Hecate’s attorney by the Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) assigned to the case. The ALJ requested that Hecate’s lawyer coordinate dates and location for public hearings with our attorney. This seems peculiar: ORES didn’t contact Copake’s representative directly, but rather asked Hecate’s lawyer to be its emissary to Copake, the euphemistically-named “host community.” We haven’t yet heard from Hecate’s attorney. How is one to interpret this, other than as further proof that ORES and the developer are working closely together, and excluding Copake from their discussions? This is a discouraging development.

Nonetheless, hope springs eternal. Our attorney informs us that even if ORES were to issue a Notice of Intent to Deny Hecate’s application, the regulations require ORES to conduct public hearings. So, we still don’t know whether ORES is evaluating seriously our longstanding concerns about the proposed project: that plans call only for woefully inadequate screening with saplings instead of mature trees; that Hecate has no plans to provide appropriate compensation for adjacent homeowners whose property values will plummet; that Hecate will clear-cut forested areas; and that fire safety issues have been completely ignored. Project components would be sited adjacent to the Taconic Hills School campus, yet there are no evacuation plans for the 1100 students, teachers, and staff. Furthermore, an access road to other areas of the proposed project crosses a stream, goes through wetlands, and is too narrow to permit the passage of a fire truck should a fire occur.

Surely ORES must understand that Hecate’s need to obtain waivers from 16 of Copake’s local law provisions is proof-positive that the proposed Shepherd’s Run site is horribly inappropriate. All ORES needs to do is compare Hecate’s requests to those of other developers who have requested many fewer waivers for much larger projects. The information is right there on ORES’ website.

If ORES issues a draft permit, it will be choosing to ignore one of the two prongs of the state’s Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act, because there can be no doubt: Shepherd’s Run would harm local agriculture and diminish Copake’s outdoor-recreation tourism appeal. It would create only one or two permanent jobs. And the electricity Shepherd’s Run would produce wouldn’t power our homes; it would go into the grid, presumably to points south.

By the November board meeting, we may have a decision from ORES.

Richard Wolf
Supervisor