

Solar Update

The Columbia County Board of Supervisors opposes development of Hecate's Shepherd's Run solar facility. Citing several concerns, the County Board twice has unanimously adopted resolutions opposing the 42-megawatt, utility-scale facility.

The proposed site would be on mostly prime agricultural land. Many of the approximately 175,000 solar panels, together with inverters, transmission lines and other equipment, would be on a field adjacent to the Taconic Hills Central School District campus. Fire safety issues are of great concern. A facility fire would put 1100 students, teachers, and staff at risk from toxic smoke and fire. The dedicated but small, all-volunteer Craryville Fire Department would be hard-pressed to muster sufficient firefighters to respond effectively. Perhaps most significantly to the Board of Supervisors, the vast majority of Copakeans do not want a very large solar factory in Craryville. Copake has opposed Shepherd's Run since Hecate first announced its intentions in 2017, and to the Board of Supervisors, this is all about Home Rule. What happens in Copake has implications for every Columbia County town.

Board of Supervisors Chairman Matt Murell put it this way, "It's a mystery to the board and myself how New York State can virtually ignore its own law when it comes to the possible permitting of this solar project. I'm referring to the principle of Home Rule." He noted that the state's official website provides that towns and villages are "general purpose" units of local government with "broad home rule powers to regulate the quality of life in communities...[and that] the home rule powers available to New York local governments are among the most far-reaching in the nation. The extent of these powers makes the local government a full partner with the state in the shared responsibility for providing services to the people." In a press release last month, Chairman Murell said, "There's no better time for New York State to stand behind its words than right now and deny the Shepherd's Run permit." He added, "This is a perfect example of the state ignoring the rights of small, rural communities."

Stuyvesant Town Supervisor and County Majority Leader Ron Knott added, "We are a community based in large part on agriculture and open spaces," said. "Our local government leaders work diligently developing comprehensive plans and local zoning regulations to protect our natural resources."

In issuing a draft siting permit for Shepherd's Run, the state's Office of Renewable Energy Siting and Electric Transmission (ORES) cavalierly overrode sixteen of Copake's zoning regulations, that had been carefully crafted over many years to protect Copake's land and beautiful, rural environment. ORES offered no substantive reasons for the overrides, noting simply that each was "unduly burdensome."

Rather than allowing Copake to continue to be a responsible, effective steward of its lands, ORES thus far has chosen to substitute its judgment for that of Copakeans, the people who know Copake best. Doing this in the name of "saving the planet" is foolish when our local environment is destroyed in the process. Shepherd's Run would not create permanent jobs for Copake, nor

would we receive the electricity that the facility would generate. That would go directly into the grid and flow south.

New York has long been a Home Rule state. It is unthinkable that its principles should be sacrificed for the benefit of an out-of-state developer who – make no mistake – is in this to make money and get out. Hecate has no interest in Copake or preserving our environment. If it is awarded a final siting permit, Hecate will sell it to an operator, pocket the profits, and move on to the next project.

In-person Public Comment Hearings, scheduled for Wednesday, January 21 and Thursday, January 22, at 2:00pm and 6:00pm each day at Copake Town Hall are important opportunities for all of us to let ORES know what Shepherd's Run's massive installation would do to our small, rural town. I anticipate that speakers will include several concerned supervisors from other county towns.

For those of you who cannot attend in-person, ORES will conduct two virtual hearings on Tuesday, January 27 at 2:00pm and 6:00pm. Those who wish to speak at a virtual hearing must sign up by noon on Monday, January 26. Instructions are available on the town website and are also posted at Town Hall. Don't wait until the last second to register: the multi-step instructions require careful attention.

Finally, we are mailing a postcard reminder of the upcoming hearings to every address in Copake, both residences and businesses. Special thanks to Town Clerk Lynn DeRocha for accomplishing this huge and important task.

I hope to see and hear many Copakeans at the ORES hearings. Make your voices heard!

Richard Wolf
Supervisor