

Porter holds public hearing on revised solar law

STAFF REPORTS

The Town of Porter began the process Monday toward addressing its nearly year-long moratorium on solar installations, with a public hearing en route to finalizing Local Law No. 1 of 2021 titled, "Solar Energy Systems."

"I am going to call people in order who have signed to express their views on the points of this law," Supervisor John Duffy Johnston said. He revealed no action would be taken that evening on passing the law and that the public hearing will remain open.

"For this hearing, it will not close today. We did not know how many people were going to show up; we thought we would have to turn some people away. So we want to hear from everybody. ... We will not close this today," Johnston said.

He said that, in addition to addressing further comments, the town still had to finalize State Environmental Quality Review matters and was awaiting input from various outside entities before taking any further action.

Porter Code Enforcement Officer Peter Jeffery said the SEQR-coordinated review remains open until Feb. 15 and this, plus the desire for additional comments, will keep the public hearing process open. A handful of residents visited with comments that night, while others submitted their remarks for the town record.

Leading off at Town Hall was resident Gloria Baker who participated with the town's appointed committee to consider the new changes to the solar law, which were outlined

into consideration what the neighbors say." She said that, throughout the committee's review, the discussions remained open and transparent and town residents were encouraged to participate.

"We worked for months on the proposed new law, and these were open to the public. We had a good showing of people who came in and expressed their opinion," Baker said. "The petition was brought forth so that we could preserve what we have here in the Town of Porter, and the reason why we all live here."

Resident Richard Ries said he was not against the concept of solar per se, and is open to solar installations in other town zoning districts beyond Porter's industrial areas.

"I read through the solar code; for the most part it's pretty standard; we see that (proposed) in towns throughout New York," he said. "There is one thing that differentiates it, is that you're only (going) to allow commercial solar in industrial areas. I looked at the map and the industrial areas don't have a lot of capacity. They're all (in) flood lines (and) they're pretty heavily wooded."

"I don't think that goes with the environmentally friendly aspects of solar, if you're going to cut down a bunch of trees to develop a solar farm. I would like to see you guys open it up to medium-density residential and also rural-residential. Maybe keep it for smaller solar farms; keep it minimal so that people can still develop their land. As long as you properly screen it, take

into consideration what the neighbors say."

Resident Paul Brown, who participated as a member of the solar advisory panel, said the proposed law does allow for solar panels in the town. Noting the aforementioned environmental concerns, he said any trees that may be cut down would be replaced as per the proposed town law.

"I think the law that's outlined here is pretty good," Brown said.

Resident Ryan Harden said commercial solar should be considered for commercial areas, i.e., in the town's industrial areas.

Resident Anthony Giurizzo said he was among those neighbors facing impact who had spoke out against the solar law last year: "I have to agree that replacing it with one green element with another element is problematic."

He questioned the town's reasoning of allowing removal of trees for a solar installation in the industrial zones, when other smaller, open areas may be available, without impact to other neighbors.

"That's a consideration that I wondered if could be allowed into the new law, to the extent that lay-over districts might accommodate greater flexibility, without impacting the community," he said.

Resident Elizabeth Reese, who submitted her comments via email, said she supported the town's latest plan.

"I think the proposal the board has come up with is a fair and reasonable plan for erecting solar farms in the town. It seems that the main opponent of the plan is OYA

Solar," Reese said.

She added, "Their opinion should carry significantly less weight than that of your populace. Solar energy is not an urgent or even essential need in the town. ... Keeping the land open and free from industrial eyesores is a key factor in getting people located here, and I hope you will maintain our rural atmosphere as much as possible."

Johnston spoke of the response from OYA Solar and the company's views that "community solar and other tier 3 solar is effectively banned in the town" under the latest plan.

"Our talk with our counsel is that we will respond and answer these (and other) questions that they have," he said.

Jeffery commented on the end consensus of the town's solar advisory board, who researched and reviewed the matter over nine meetings this past year.

"They did not necessarily want it in the rural agricultural lands, they wanted to protect our agricultural resources for agriculture," he said. "While I understand where they're (OYA Solar) coming from, from a developer, the sentiment that was prevalent at our solar committee meetings was they wanted to conserve our ag lands for ag use."

Jeffery said the committee had

an open dialogue with OYA Solar reps during the review process.

"We included them in our solar meetings," he said. "They're not really being blindsided; I think they knew where this was headed because they were involved."

Johnston also shared comments he received from 1st District Niagara County Legislator Irene Meyers. He said Meyers' primary objective is to "protect and preserve our community, our agriculture, and our heritage."

"I am not against solar energy, but like everything else, it has its place," Meyers wrote. "I do not feel that acres of solar panels belong on fertile farmland. It is my understanding that OYA Solar feels that we are not offering enough to our community solar program. We are. The town has worked to come up with a plan that offers implementing solar energy but also protecting the community."

"We are not going to allow more land in the Town of Porter to be taken for the sake of the dollar."

The town announced comments would continue to be accepted while SEQR issues are handled and OYA Solar's concerns are addressed.

No OYA Solar representative was present at this meeting.

•The Town of Porter contributed to this report.

New York Power Authority awarded \$250,000 to study impacts of ice on Niagara Power Plant

The New York Power Authority has been awarded two grants to fund demonstration projects – one that will analyze the impact of ice on a hydropower plant and one to test an advanced technology that evaluates the health of high voltage assets in a substation. The two \$125,000 grants come from the American Public Power Association's Demonstration of Energy & Efficiency Developments program, which funds research, pilot projects and education to improve the operations and services of public power utilities.

"The APPA recognizes the importance of these forward-thinking projects that will improve generation and transmission operations and allow data to be shared with other utilities seeking best practices," said Alan Ettlinger, senior director of research, technology development and innovation.

NYPA will undertake the follow-

ing projects:

- ✓ Analyze the impact of ice on hydropower resources with machine learning. NYPA has had significant power generation losses due to ice blockages near intake valves in the Niagara River and has worked to address the issue with industry groups and other utilities. During the winter, water can become supercooled all the way to the bottom of the river, leading to the formation of frazil ice crystals, anchor ice, or both. Anchor and frazil ice affects water availability estimation by Niagara River Control Center and frazil ice can affect hydropower plan operation since it's "sticky" and can result in ice formation on the plant's water turbines. These studies will include using 3-D sonar to quantify the impact of frazil ice on the efficiency of the hydropower units and forecasting the formation of anchor and frazil ice with a look ahead of a few

days to a few weeks.

- ✓ Smart insulation condition monitoring system (CMS) for substation assets. A state-of-the-art condition monitoring system will be developed to constantly monitor the insulation condition of various high voltage assets (transformers, GIS, switchgears and cables) in a substation. The CMS consists of smart sensing, advanced noise mitigation and artificial intelligence for data interpretation. The system will use an advanced diagnostic technology that recognizes and evaluates defects and provides guidance for maintenance planning. The system will improve the power grid reliability, reduce customer outage costs, and help asset management optimize maintenance and maximize asset life.

The projects are expected to last two years and NYPA expects to release study results by spring 2023.

Enrollment for 2021/2022 academic year is on.

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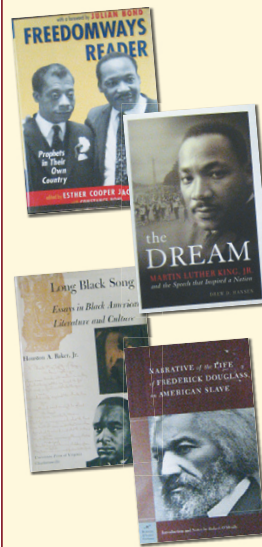
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