

Residents voice opposition on Townline Road solar project

Farming interests, property values focus of concerns

BY TERRY DUFFY

Editor-in-Chief

Community solar – and the lack of public support for it – continues to make news in Niagara County.

In the Town of Lewiston – where a recent moratorium was lifted – proposals by developers have again resumed. So has the opposition of town residents.

Monday evening, the town held a public hearing to consider a 28-acre, ground-mounted utility-grade solar system by applicant Mary Ann Kilmer/Saturn Power at 4616 Townline Road. Six residents visited with Supervisor Steve Broderick and board members to express their opinions; none were favorable.

"I am not for the solar farm. We just moved in October; had I known the solar farm was going in this property, I would not have bought the house; many of neighbors feel the same way," Charlotte Patterson said. "I have a 2-year-old; her safety is what I think about. I would not choose a property so close to a solar farm. Fire is a big concern. ... I am against the project for safety, for our property values."

Andrew and Roberta Colotta who live next door to the proposed facility, told the board they maintain an active farm operation.

"I live right next to the solar farm on two sides. I have concerns," Roberta said. "Anything done on that farmland is going to affect ours. It's going to change our ditches, change how we drain. Everything that runs off their farm is going to affect ours."

The residents told the board they farm for hay, have animals, harvest eggs from their ducks and raise pigs.

"We're working our farm as a farm and I'd rather not have it contaminated with ... all the things that could happen," she said. "I've worked in construction sites; I see the dirt everywhere. It's going to be a mess when they start their drilling. When it's over, what's their property going to look like for us? We're the ones that's going to have to look at it."

"So our property value is going to go down. No one wants to live there."

The resident, as did others who spoke, suggested the town look at other sites.

"Put it in areas where you can't farm," Roberta said. "Put it at the Nike Base, put it somewhere else, don't put it next to us where we all bought this for residential farms. ... I am totally against this going in."

Herbert Meisner, a retired teacher and principal, lives across the street on Albright Road. He mentioned the natural beauty of the area and noted his concerns.

"The result of a solar farm is (that it's) going to disturb the environment," he said. "When you look at the environment, it's more than the just the air ... it includes the things that we see. And to look at that – to the unsightly panels of a solar farm – it really would bother me."

Meisner said he also had issue with solar panels and the uncertainties with recycling.

"What do they do with the solar panels once they're done with

them? What do they do with those panels? What of the toxins that are inside those panels that would disturb the water?" he asked.

The resident, like others suggested, the glut of landfills or idle properties in Niagara County would be far better suited for a solar operation.

"Why don't we put it on land that is fruitful, that can be used to produce things that we need. (I don't know)," he said. "I don't know why we are producing solar panels, solar energy, when we don't know how we are going to dispose of those solar panels. I am totally against green energy until we can prove that it cannot disrupt the visual environment of our country."

Townline Road's Susan Mielke told the board, "This is going to butt up to the west side of my property. I, like everyone, has the same safety concerns about this. As far as the environment, (I) cannot have a bonfire at my house though a certain period of time because of the migration of geese. ... What is 28 acres of solar panels going to do? All that wildlife that's there, it's all going to be disrupted."

Mielke also questioned the presence of a main natural gas pipeline that runs to the rear of her property.

"What's going to happen with those? And as far as the look, what of it?" she asked. "It's their property and they can do what they want with it, but when I'm losing the value of my house, that's wrong. I'm just totally opposed to it."

Project rep Jerry Perran spoke briefly with board members on the proposed 5-megawatt solar facility. He said, thus far, it conforms to state Ag and Markets regulations; has received tentative state Department of Transportation approval with actual permits still to come; was still awaiting final determination from the Army Corps; has received approval by the Lewiston Environmental Commission; and the applicant was still working with the Town of Lewiston with re-

gard to future decommissioning as well as the issuing of a PILOT.

"We're at a crossroads of meeting that" PILOT requirements for the town, the IDA, school district and county, Perran said. He noted the Phase 1 environmental impact statement has been completed on the property as well as a State Environmental Quality Review and pollution prevention plan. All of which await further extensive review by the town.

Broderick closed by stating no action would be taken on the solar farm that night. He intends to look further into the status of the natural gas pipeline on the rear of the property.

Wrapping up:

•The town announced that, with COVID-19 restrictions easing, it would revert to its current "Hawking and Peddling Law" when it comes to issuing soliciting and peddling permits in the town. Issuing of those permits had been suspended over past months due to the pandemic. For more information, contact the town clerk's office.

•Town Engineer Rob Lannon of GHD Consulting Services said he anticipates the town waterline improvement project to be completed by July 14, but forecasted up to a 10-week delay due to final sign-offs by CSX government railroad interests who have been involved with the project in the Hoover Road area above the hill.

"The last bit of work that we need to do is a case crossing at the railroad tracks," he said. "As part of the permit ... CSX requires flagmen to be there during that process. No flagman, no case crossing. The railroad is especially particular about that."

Lannon said CSX flagmen would not be available until the fall, "So it could be another 10 weeks before that last 500 feet (of line) is installed."

"It's a bit of disappointing news, but everything else we expect to be completed by July 14."

OBITUARIES

Vincent L. Pino

Vincent L. Pino, 94, of Green Valley, Arizona, went to his heavenly home on June 15, 2021.

He was born in February 1927 in Beyer, Pennsylvania, to Guiseppe and Josephine (Arella) Pino. Vince proudly served as a sergeant in the U.S. Army from 1945-53 and was stationed in Italy. It was there he fell in love and married his wife of 59 years, Maria. Upon returning to the states, they moved to Niagara Falls and eventually to the Town of Wheatfield to raise their family.

Vince was an active member of the community, recently recognized for his 55 years of volunteer service to the Adams Fire Co. While living in the Town of Wheatfield, he was a member of St. Joseph Parish, Wheatfield Seniors and the American Legion. In 2007, he moved to Green Valley where he continued his active life as a member of Our Lady of the Valley Church, the Italian Catholic Federation, American Legion Post 66 and as a volunteer at the White Elephant Thrift Store.

Throughout his life, Vince enjoyed the company of friends, playing cards and bingo. He was an avid bowler and enjoyed gardening, photography and



Vincent L. Pino

hunting with his family for many years. In his later years, Vince's pet Chihuahuas, Bruce and Katy, were his beloved companions and always by his side.

Vince was predeceased in passing by his wife, Maria Pino. He is survived by his four children: Ann (Joe) Suto, Bob (Patty) Pino, Michael (Bettejo) Pino and Paul (Rodney) Pino; five grandchildren: Katie (Suto) Sacco, Vicky Suto, Billy Pino, Krystal Pino and Christopher Pino; and four great-grandchildren.

Memorial donations may be sent to Adams Fire Co. in Wheatfield.

Communities asked to take survey on Lake Ontario conditions

Public survey open until July 7

Legislator Irene Myers encouraged Niagara County residents along the Lake Ontario shoreline to participate in a survey on changing lake conditions as part of the Niagara Orleans Coastal Lakeshore Economy and Resiliency (CLEAR) initiative.

"The CLEAR initiative was launched by New York state in response to the extreme high-water levels in Lake Ontario experienced in 2017 and again in 2019," she said. "This planning effort aims to help shoreline communities in Niagara and Orleans counties identify ways to increase their long-term

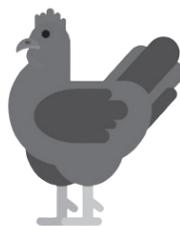
resilience to changing lake conditions, including high- and low-water events, flooding and erosion."

Myers said the CLEAR initiative will engage local communities over the next several months to develop a long-term strategic plan for coastal resiliency. Residents, businesses and other stakeholders along the Lake Ontario and Niagara River shorelines are being asked by New York state to share their input via a public survey that can be taken at www.niagaraorleansclear.com centered on how the changing lake conditions are impacting the community.

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