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Niagara County 'cannot afford to take a wait and see approach' on green energy

Green energy is a part of our future. Let me say that upfront. In some way, shape or form, the growth of the green energy industry is inevitable and when done the right way, that is a positive. The problem that many people have, including across Niagara County, is where these large, industrial wind and solar projects are sited.

That battle is now raging across many communities, especially since New York state basically took away local control for siting these projects and can override local zoning laws. One solar project that gobbles up thousands of acres of farmland can truly change the entire makeup of a community.

Niagara County has been aggressive in working with local communities to push back against New York state's overreach. The potential loss of agriculture land for these projects is definitely one of our biggest concerns. According to the most recent census data, there are 690 farms in Niagara

County covering 140,259 acres, so clearly farmland protection is important to us. The fact of the matter is that, once a piece of agriculture land is lost to another use, it is gone forever.

New York state did announce the creation of a farmland protection working group to study these concerns. We have contacted the state agriculture commissioner and asked that someone from Niagara County be appointed to this group. It's important to have our collective voices heard.

In addition, the Niagara County Legislature voted to opt out of a state program that provides tax incentives to these projects. Now, our IDA will only consider tax payment agreements for projects that are supported by a local community on a site that makes sense, like a former brownfield for example.

But as I said, there are going to be more green energy projects built so, while we attempt to address their location, we also need to be thinking about other issues. As we all know too well, we have the unfortunate legacies from the nuclear and chemical industries that were celebrated as the future technologies at the time. But, the waste from those technologies

ultimately did major harm to our community. We do not want history to repeat itself.

That's why my colleague, Legislator Dave Godfrey, took the lead in writing a first-of-its-kind local law in New York state that will hold manufacturers responsible for disposing and recycling spent solar panels. This effort was done in conjunction with Niagara County's environmental coordinator, Dawn Timm, and the Product Stewardship Institute (PSI). The inclusion of internationally regarded PSI was hugely important as they had the resources to engage the input of industry stakeholders and capitalize on the best practices from around the world.

We believe this local law creates a convenient, safe and environmentally sound system for the recycling of solar panels, minimizing hazardous waste and recovering commercially valuable materials. A synopsis of provisions includes:

- No manufacturer, distributor, retailer or installer may sell or offers for sale a photovoltaic module in or into Niagara County unless the manufacture of the PV modules is in full compliance with the local law.
- Manufacturers are required

to submit stewardship plans that ensure the convenient, safe and environmentally sound takeback and recycling of PV modules and installation components. Plan details are outlined in the law and the manufacturer or stewardship organization must consult with the county. The expense for this effort is fully borne by the manufacturer.

• Prohibits the sale of any PV module in the county unless the manufacturer is in compliance. A fee of \$100/module/day per panel sold will be enforced for those not in compliance.

• Includes all PV modules sold for residential and commercial installations.

Now, the fact is that this recycling effort should have been driven by New York state and applied statewide, and maybe someday it will be. But we cannot afford to take a wait and see approach.

Already, other local governments are calling us for information on this effort and hopefully will follow our lead. After all, as green energy continues to expand, we need to be sure our public policy efforts keep up to protect our communities.

Bill Justyk's leadership makes Lewiston proud

The Lewiston community owes Bill Justyk a huge debt of gratitude.

Bill has just finished a term as commander of the local VFW Post 7487. During his tenure, the VFW has seen a remarkable transition that has taken it to the next level and beyond. Among a long list of accomplishments, Bill's leadership and tenacity was directly responsible for the installation of beautiful new "Circle of Honor" veterans memorial at Academy Park.

The project would not have been possible without the tremen-

dous support from Bill's VFW comrades, the dozens of benefactors and sponsors that supported the memorial, and our local governments.

Despite the skeptics, Bill's vision and mission was clear – nothing was going to stand in his way to rally the troops and get the job done. While the mountain he had to climb seemed insurmountable, and the VFW had never attempted such an imposing project, many wondered, "Is the VFW biting off more than it can chew?"

Bill's can-do attitude and enthusiasm were contagious.

Regardless of the daily setbacks he faced, he always remained laser-focused on the solutions and the goal. His perseverance and determination were only matched by his pure intentions to honor and recognize the men and women of Lewiston who have sacrificed their time, energy and lives in service to their country and hometown.

Hundreds of thousands of people, including relatives, loved ones and even strangers, will be visiting the "Circle of Honor" over the decades to come. All of them will be touched by the memorial

as our manifestation of the tribute and respect we have for our local veterans. Many of them will be inspired to go on and serve our great nation.

For that, we are so thankful and proud to call Bill Justyk a friend and neighbor. In true military fashion, Bill "improvised, adapted and overcame" the obstacles to see his mission through. His leadership, his love of Lewiston, and his devotion for his military brothers and sisters will not be forgotten.

Lee Simonson

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