

Solar energy projects continue in Lewiston

Town to submit proposal to village on Lewiston Family Ice Rink

BY TERRY DUFFY

Editor-in-Chief

Proposals for ground-mounted, utility-grade solar energy projects continue to gain momentum in the Town of Lewiston.

Coming off last month's public hearing to consider a solar facility by applicants Kevan Thompson and Janelle Uderitz of DG New York CS III LLC on a private property at 2645 Ridge Road, the Lewiston Town Board held another session to consider yet another solar facility, this time at 2564 Saunders Settlement Road.

The proposal represents the sixth such project in the town since the Lewiston Town Board first began authorizing such projects.

Proposed by Caldwell/Borrego Solar Systems Inc., the Ridge Road project calls for a ground-mounted, utility-scale operation featuring 13.53 acres of arrays on 97.6 acres. Borrego representatives Steve Long and Mark Anthony called the project "environmentally friendly" in their brief remarks Monday to Supervisor Steve Broderick and Town Board members.

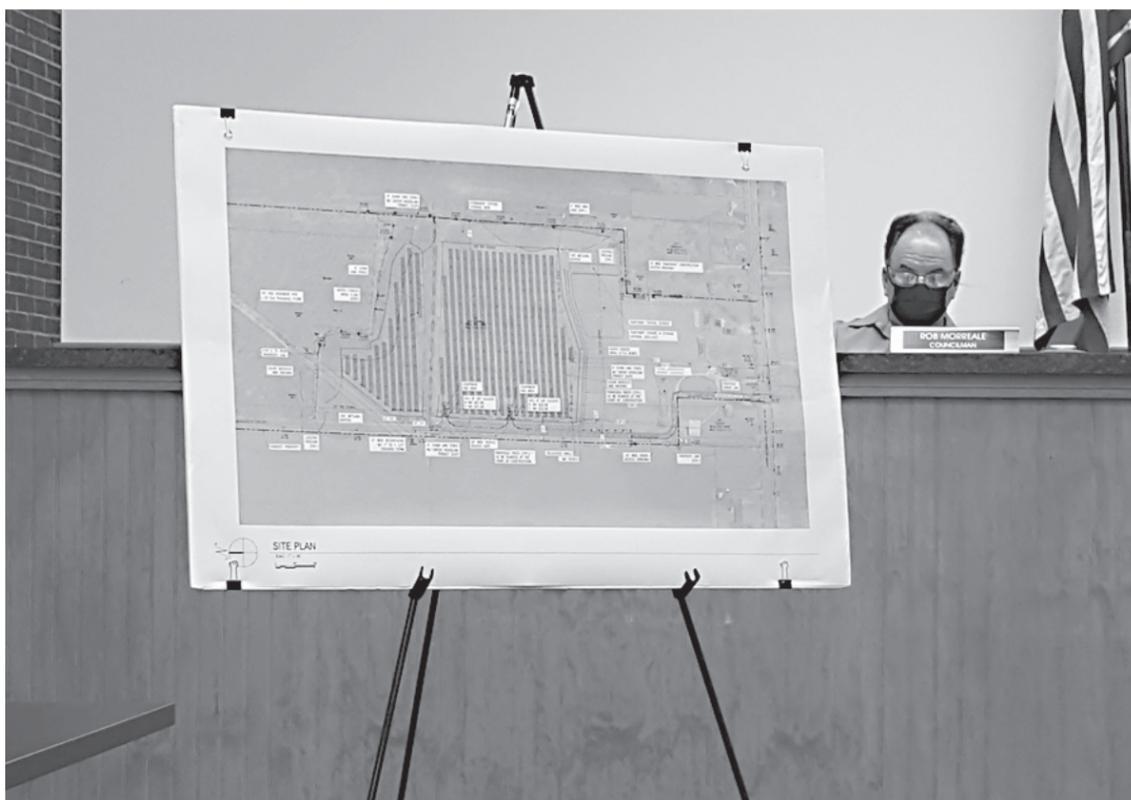
"The construction of the facility is environmentally friendly with only minor excavations required," Anthony said. He noted the project falls within town code specifications covering solar, with respect to property setbacks, visual impacts to neighboring properties, property maintenance, project noise and glare.

However, as in the case with other public hearings the town has held on such solar proposals, opposition was again heard. One resident was on hand to speak.

"I moved into rural residential and I expected farm fields and this is an industrial solar field, not tractors and such," said resident Jeremy Genter of Saunders Settlement Road. "I'm against it. ... I live in the adjacent property that surrounds that. When I look out my backyard or outside my second-story window, all I'm going to see is an array of solar fields."

Genter went on to present what he called a number of "red flags" to board members about the project. Among them: an entrance driveway already under construction, and expected glare and additional drainage issues on top of what he is already contending with.

"Where's this extra water going to go?" he asked. "Are we as taxpayers going to have to pay for pumps to suffice this water drainage? How this is going to pan out is beyond me; we just had



Plans were discussed for the 13.53-acre solar project under consideration at 2564 Saunders Settlement Road. (Photo by Terry Duffy)

a flood back there, my basement flooded."

"There's a bunch of concerns there," he added. "This project's going to have a lot of fishy stuff going there."

Responding to the resident's concerns Broderick said he wanted such issues as visual impacts and drainage addressed. Broderick also said he was not happy with prior solar projects in the town completed earlier by Borrego Solar. He mentioned the Swann Road property as a case in point.

That property - the first completed utility-grade solar project in the town - happens to be owned by Town Building/Code Enforcement Inspector Tim Masters. It went on to generate complaints with later projects, including one on Moore Road that led to a town-issued moratorium on solar construction. That moratorium has since expired following town adjustments to its solar law.

"I wanted to say something. ... I was incredibly disappointed with the screening on Swann Road," Broderick said. "That was pathetic. That was the first solar farm that went in; that was the one we were basing everything else off of. It seemed there was a lack of response from Borrego. You guys sent somebody out here; he was in 100% agreement. ... He went back and nothing got done."

As a result, Broderick said every solar farm in the town will now be required to have "beefy, beefy screening, including this one. ... I was absolutely not satisfied. Before any approval, it is going to have a minimum of 10-foot trees."

"I can't tell you how disappointed I was with the first solar farm that went in. We learned from our mistakes and we're going to correct it."

Broderick said the town would take no action that night on the Caldwell/Borrego Solar project.

Later on at the session, the Town Board, after declaring Lewiston as lead agency on the aforementioned Thompson-Ridge Road solar facility, went on to approve a negative declaration on that project. And in its subsequent approval of a site plan, the board announced it would require 10 additional conditions covering all the particulars associated with any solar facility development now planned and in the future.

Included are: a decommissioning plan; compliance with all requirements under the town code; an agreed-to PILOT or community host agreement; requirements that the solar energy system operate in accordance with all New York Ag and Markets requirements; screening requirements; that the lands be cleaned and remediated; that proper licensing permits for federal wetlands be

issued; that a notice of intent be filed with NYS Ag and Markets; a maintenance plan be established, including areas outside the fence from the array; and that all plantings of trees need to be 10 feet in height.

With that, the site plan for the Thompson project was approved.

In other news from the session:

•The town announced it would be submitting a formal request to the Village of Lewiston covering construction of the Lewiston Family Ice Rink at Academy Park and related operations. Included would be a request for the rink to remain at its earlier location at the northeast corner of the park due to utility concerns and operation of the warming facility.

Town discussions on the rink and its future also evolved around it being financially viable, with Town Recreation Director Mike Dashineau informing board members he would be investigating the matter further.

•The board approved for Town Engineer Robert Lannon of GHD Associates to begin preliminary background work and bidding for the first of what could be up to three pavilions eyed at the new Riverside Town Park now under construction on Lower River Road. Broderick said the first pavilion would be an open-air structure, with others still to be determined in coming years.



Marble Orchard Ghost Walks canceled

On Wednesday, the Lewiston Council on the Arts announced, "We regretfully announce that the 2021 Marble Orchard Ghost Walks have been canceled. This difficult decision was made for several reasons. First and foremost, the lead character has become incapacitated following a serious car accident and her absence will negatively impact the quality of the audience experience. In addition, despite a mask requirement and rising COVID numbers in Niagara County, compliance has been low. While we were looking forward to seeing everyone at the event, the safety of the audience and our presenters is of great concern."

"We sincerely apologize for any inconvenience this may cause and we look forward to seeing everyone at future events."

"Thank you for your understanding."

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FRI 6AM-2PM - Haddock, Fish Sandwiches, Tuna Melts & New England Clam Chowder
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