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Land sale clouds fate of Shepherd's Run

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Columbia-Greene Media
Jan 5, 2024



File photo The future of the proposed Shepherd's Run Solar Energy project in the town of Copake is up in the air following the sale of 60 acres that will no longer be leased to Hecate Energy.

COPAKE — Sale of a key parcel of land could place the proposed Shepherd's Run solar energy project in jeopardy.

Craryville Farms LLC purchased 60 acres at the corner of Cambridge Road and county Route 7 on Tuesday, according to a statement from Sensible Solar for Rural New York. The new owner will not lease the land back to Hecate Energy, the company planning to build Shepherd's Run, for inclusion in the project.

"We don't know what this will mean for the future of the project," said Brittany Kenny, senior public affairs manager with Martin Group Marketing, which is working with Sensible Solar. "But we do know it brings everything into question, and we know it throws a monkey wrench into the project."

The town of Copake filed a petition Tuesday with the New York State Office of Renewable Energy Siting, or ORES, seeking immediate adjournment of two public hearings scheduled for Jan. 9 and Jan. 10, and to dismiss Hecate's application as "infeasible and inaccurate."

Attorney Benjamin Wisniewski, who represents the town, declined to comment on the matter Thursday.

Kenny said ORES' ruling on the town's petition will determine the need to hold the public hearings.

No one at Hecate Energy's main office in Chicago responded to emails and a phone call seeking comment on the project or the petition.

Hecate's lease option on the property expired in September 2023, according to Kenny. Craryville Farms acquired the land from a local farmer.

Sensible Solar is a coalition of concerned citizens in rural Columbia County in strong opposition to Shepherd's Run — a proposed 265-acre, industrial-size solar installation to be sited near Route 23, Route 7 and Route 11A in Craryville and Copake, adjacent to the Taconic Hills Consolidated School and Copake Lake community and recreational area.

"The farmer who sold the land to the LLC wants it to remain forever agricultural, so the land will remain in active agricultural use," Kenny said. She did not give the farmer's name and she did not disclose the purchase price for the land.

Removal of the land parcel reduces the proposed solar project by about 20%, reduces productive capacity by 10 to 15 megawatts and takes the project out of compliance with the nameplate capacity of 60 megawatts required in Hecate's New York State Energy Research and Development Authority contract, according to Sensible Solar.

“The lease option expired in September and was not renewed by the landowner,” said Sara Traberman, who represents Craryville on the Sensible Solar leadership team. “To our knowledge, the lease option expiration was not disclosed to the town of Copake or New York state, and that raises questions about the accuracy of other information in Hecate’s application.”

Traberman said that as recently as Dec. 30, Hecate sent a brochure to Copake residents telling them the 60-acre parcel remained part of the project.

The sale eliminates about 60 acres of fenced property acreage and more project acreage may be lost to required property line setbacks, according to Sensible Solar. The sale also removes key equipment and eliminates two access roads.