

HUDSON VALLEY // NEWS

Farmers' purchase takes land from controversial Shepherd's Run solar proposal

Opponents believe the acquisition will sink the project; Copake asks for its application to be dismissed

By **Lana Bellamy**

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Soar panels in the Columbia County community of Craryville, near Copake. A large solar project in Copake, Shepherd's Run, is facing a new hurdle after opponents purchased property slated for the development.

Times Union file photo

COPAKE — [A proposed solar farm in Copake](#) that has been entangled in a legal fight for nearly three years faces a new hurdle after opponents of the project purchased 60 acres slated for the development.

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On Tuesday, a group of opponents calling itself Craryville Farms LLC said it purchased a parcel near Cambridge Road and county Route 7 that was part of Hecate Energy's 880-acre proposal. The purchase, the group said, will reduce the project's productive capacity by 20 percent, thus preventing it from meeting the 60-megawatt threshold required by Hecate's contract with the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority.

"We applaud the buyer's intention to preserve prime farmland consistent with the community's wishes and the objectives of the town's Comprehensive Plan," said Sara Traberman, a resident and member of Sensible Solar for Rural New York, a group that organized in opposition to the Hecate project.

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The opponents believe this acquisition could sink the proposal. But Hecate wouldn't offer any insight into its next step — nor address if the project is, in fact, doomed — when the Times Union reached out to spokesman Steven Sullivan on Thursday.

"The company will let the process speak for itself," Sullivan said.

The land purchase takes out 59.77 acres of fenced acreage the project was planning to use, as well as two access roads, according to a news release

from Sensible Solar.

The lease option on the property expired in September and was not renewed by the landowner, according to Sensible Solar and a Jan. 2 filing the town of Copake made with the state Office of Renewable Energy Siting. In the filing, Copake called Hecate's project application "fatally flawed," asking administrative law judges to dismiss it and cancel upcoming public hearings because of the company's purported failure to inform the state of any uncertainty over obtaining property rights for what they called a key portion of the project.

Copake contended that Hecate would now be forced to redesign the project using new, previously unidentified parcels or redistribute parts of the project across parcels that were "optimized for reducing impacts."

Since the Shepherd's Run project was first proposed in 2017 by Hecate, a Chicago-based corporation, opponents have fought it in court, unsuccessfully, and organized against it. The proposal would build a solar array on about 220 acres of an 880-acre footprint along and around Routes 23 and 7 that would connect to a nearby New York State Electric & Gas substation. Once connected, Shepherd's Run would provide 60 megawatts of power back to the grid, enough to power 15,000 homes annually, according to Hecate.

Opponents have said the solar array would mar scenic views and detract from the bucolic nature of this part of Columbia County, which has historically been dairy farm country but in recent years has also seen an influx of affluent second homeowners, many from New York City. The proposal also sparked the creation of a group that favors the idea, Friends of Solar Columbia County.

Hecate officials have said they are aware of local concerns and have downsized and adjusted their original plans for a 480-acre project. They are looking at creating pollinator habitats and may help farmers grow Christmas trees, which would act as visual screens for the solar panels.

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Last fall, Shepherd's Run received draft approval from the state Office of Renewable Energy Siting, the agency that handles requests for such projects. A public comment period will be open throughout this month. The expectation has been that if all of the project requirements are met, the developers could conceivably break ground in a year, according to an earlier Times Union report.

Four in-person public comment hearings have been scheduled for Jan. 9 and 10 in the town of Copake, and two virtual public comment hearings on Jan. 11.

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By [Lana Bellamy](#)



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