



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 6, 2025

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INDUSTRIAL SCALE SOLAR AGAIN THREATENS COLUMBIA COUNTY
TOWN OPPOSES NEW APPLICATION TO BUILD IN COPAKE

The Chicago-based energy developer Hecate, whose application for a controversial utility-scale solar facility, in Copake, NY, was denied in January, 2024, filed again for a permit on December 23, 2024. The project met with immediate opposition from the Town of Copake, which asked the state Office of Renewable Energy Siting (ORES) to reject the new permit application on the grounds that Hecate had not given the required 60 day notice of its intent. A ruling on Copake’s Motion is expected in a few days.

Sensible Solar for Rural New York (SSRNY), a local citizen group, vows to oppose the project by every available means, citing its potentially severe environmental and economic impact. “This project will sit on prime agricultural land and threatens the drinking water for the City of Hudson. It borders an Audubon bird sanctuary on one side and the Taconic Hills Central Schools on the other, and straddles the Taghkanic Creek, the sole source of Hudson’s water. The 12 to 18-month construction process has the potential to pollute the watershed. This is not where we should be building a large solar facility,” states Sara Traberman of SSRNY.

The City of Hudson weighed in with concerns about the potential impact of the project on its drinking water in October, 2024, with the Common Council passing a Resolution in Opposition to Proposed Siting of the Shepherd’s Run Solar Project within

the Taghkanic Creek Watershed. It urged the NYS energy siting office not to grant a permit until Hecate can show that the construction and operation of the project will not negatively impact the Watershed, which supplies 100 percent of Hudson's water.

Prominent state legislators, and all local elected officials, are also on record against the project. State Senator Michelle Hinchey, chair of the NY Senate Agriculture Committee, State Senator Peter Harckham, chair of the NY Senate Environment Committee, Assemblywoman Didi Barrett, Chair of the Assembly Energy Committee, and Richard Wolf, Copake Town Supervisor, opposed the project in letters to ORES.

Hecate's original permit application was denied last year, in February 2024, when the company lost control of part of the site. A farmer who owned a portion of the site decided not to renew his lease option with Hecate. The farmer sold the property to a new owner who intends to keep the land agricultural.

Hecate, which is calling the project Shepherds Run, downsized its original plan from 60MW to 42MW in response. However the project still sprawls over 700 acres, including wetlands, streams and the Taghkanic Creek which supplies Hudson's water. The solar panels when built will cover 215 acres, according to Hecate's website.

"ORES must act to protect the watershed, wildlife and local agriculture," states Traberman of SSRNY. "The State has given ORES the sole authority over whether to grant a permit for this facility to be built. Any local zoning laws, or ordinances like buffer zones around streams, can be overridden if ORES determines they are 'unduly burdensome' to the project developer. We need ORES to insure that we don't sacrifice the environment in the name of renewable energy."

"This is the wrong place for a utility-size solar project," says Vicki Sander of SSRNY. "We are committed to working with Columbia County, the town of Copake and the State of New York to make sure citizen views are taken into account and any renewable energy project adheres to local law," says Sander.

For more information on Sensible Solar for Rural New York and the Shepherd's Run solar project see sensible-solar.org.

Available for comment: Assemblymember Didi Barrett