

# Hinchey speaks out against Hecate solar farm



Site of the proposed Shepherd's Run Solar Project in Copake.

BY TIFFANY GREENWALDT-SIMON

COPAKE — A state senator joined a community group by speaking out against the New York State Energy Research and Development agency granting Hecate Energy a renewable

energy certificate for its Shepherd's Run Solar Project.

The awarding of the renewable energy certificate was announced last week by Gov. Kathy Hochul and the New York State Energy Research & Development Authority. Through the certification, the company is eligible to sell some of the energy created by the project back to the New York State Energy Research & Development Authority, after the project is completed.

The energy certificate allows developers to pursue lower financing costs and gives renewable energy projects a more predictable revenue stream if they meet the criteria outlined by the state renewable agency.

According to the New York State Energy Research & Development Authority, The payments will not occur until the project receives off the required permits, it is approved by the state Office of Renewable Energy Siting, and construction is completed. Twenty-six other projects were approved by the state energy development agency, and, if approved, the projects are expected to be fully operational by 2029.

State Sen. Michelle Hinchey, D-41, said in a statement the state Energy Research & Development Authority's decision to award the project a renewable energy certificate was "absurd" and a waste of government resources due to the project being denied previously by the state siting office.

"Either the agency is intentionally funneling public dollars into a company that hasn't made any substantive project changes since it's rejection — diverting limited resources away from viable projects that could help us meet our climate goals — or they truly believe Shepherd's Run is viable, which signals a complete disregard for the serious issues that led to its denial," she said.

Hecate's first application for the Shepherd's Run Solar Project — initially a 60-megawatt solar project on a 265-acre parcel of land in Copake — was rejected by the state Office of Renewable Energy Siting in February 2024 after Hecate lost access to a parcel of land necessary for the project.

The land was being leased by Hecate, and when the lease ran out in

September 2023, the land was purchased by Craryville Farms LLC, a company not affiliated with Hecate. The company declined to lease the land back to Hecate.

Hinchey added in her statement the project would contradict the siting standards outlined by the New York State Energy Research & Development Authority, due to it industrializing farmland, impacting wetlands and disrupting wildlife habitats.

“If this is what NYSERDA [New York State Energy Research & Development Authority] considers fundable, then the agency’s scoring and review process is broken and needs to be fixed,” she said. “At a time when federal climate denialism is at an all-time high and related funding is on the chopping block, every dollar matters. New Yorkers deserve better stewardship of our clean energy future.”

Hecate submitted a new application for a smaller, 42-megawatt solar facility on a 215-acre parcel of land in December 2024, and the application was deemed incomplete in February, the second time the company had received an incomplete designation for the project. The first incomplete designation occurred in May 2022 during the application process for the first version of the project.

The application for the second, smaller project was deemed incomplete by the state agency due to multiple factors, including the submitted design drawings, as well as information on the visual impact of the project and wetland impacts.

Last week, Hecate submitted a response to the state Office of Renewable Energy Siting outlining the actions it took in addressing the reasoning the state siting agency used to deem the application incomplete, including information on the design drawings and when they would be submitted to the agency, as well as changes to the visual impacts section of application, and the inclusion of simulations of the appearance of the project.

Sarah Traberma, a representative from Sensible Solar for Rural New York, a coalition of concerned citizens in Columbia County who oppose the Shepherd’s Run project, said in a statement the state Office of Renewable Energy Siting should not deem the project’s application complete, and expressed concern over the project’s proximity to the Taconic Hills Central School District and Taghkanic Creek.

“Neither NYSEERDA nor ORES [Office of Renewable Energy Siting] have given this project the scrutiny required under their own regulations,” Traberman said. “The lack of a fire evacuation plan for the Taconic Schools, the lack of protection for the watershed for Hudson’s drinking water, the absence of up-to-date studies on endangered bird species previously found at the site, all must be addressed,”

Traberman added the proposed project will not make a large contribution to the state’s renewable energy goals.

“We absolutely need more renewable energy,” she said. “We have only begun to exploit the opportunities for solar on rooftops, shopping malls and brownfields. The Shepherd’s Run project will make a minuscule contribution to the New York’s renewable energy goals. The more details we learn about Shepherd’s Run, the more we feel that this project is wrong for Copake, for Columbia County and for New York state.”

Hecate’s new project includes the reduction in size of the project’s fenced-in area to 175 acres, as well as an agrivoltaics plan to allow sheep to graze in 73 acres of land covered by the solar arrays. Battery energy storage was also removed from the project.

Hecate has also said it would conduct training with local fire departments and first responders, and provide bidding opportunities to local suppliers to allow for the use of local labor in the project, if possible.

Hecate Senior Director of Development and Shepherd’s Run Project Director Matt Levine said in a statement the company’s application for a renewable energy certificate was accepted by the New York State Energy Research & Development Authority.

“After many years of engaging with the community and making significant adjustments to address their concerns, Shepherd’s Run is one of the most thoroughly vetted and carefully considered renewable energy projects in New York,” he said. “While ORES is continuing to review our permit application, we remain committed to building a project that can help New York state meet its clean energy goals while supporting the economy, protecting the natural resources, and preserving the rural character of this special community. Shepherd’s Run has already been greatly improved by incorporating feedback from community members

along the way, and we look forward to our continued working relationship in the future.”

Hecate had previously engaged an independent working group, made up of representatives from the organizations Sensible Solar for Rural New York, Friends of Columbia Solar, the Columbia Land Columbia Land Conservancy, Scenic Hudson, Cornell University, the Audubon Society, as well as state Assembly members and landscapes architects, in 2021 to review the project and landscaping designs included in the initial application.

The suggestions from the working group were formally presented to Hecate in 2022, and included the removal of battery storage and the incorporation of wildlife-friendly fencing. Hecate also previously held a community meeting in Hillsdale in April 2024 to present the changes to the project, as well as a virtual meeting in February.

The state Office of Renewable Energy Siting has 60 days to review Hecate’s revised application and issue a completeness determination. From there, if the application is deemed complete, the state agency will have one year to make a final decision on permitting the project.