

December 10, 2024

Dear Town of Ulster Planning Board,

On behalf of TownofUlsterCitizens.org, thank you for this opportunity to speak tonight. We felt it was especially important to be heard on the Tuytenbridge Solar Project. We would like to call your attention to the 15-year old Town of Ulster Comprehensive Plan, which is the guide we, and you as stewards for our town, have to guide us as we all strive for creating a better Town of Ulster. Although outdated, it does make specific mention of the forested ridge bordered by Route 9W, Route 32 and Route 209.

In the executive summary, it emphasizes that the Town of Ulster should “provide greater protection of ridgelines from inappropriate development.” On page 43, it goes on to say that “The Catskill Mountains, the Hudson River uplands, the ridgeline between Route 9W and Route 32 and the ridgeline along the Rondout Creek are critical features of the Town of Ulster’s heritage whose preservation enriches and benefits both residents and visitors.” Per the Lightstar Renewables applicant, this ridge contains eagles nests and wetlands, and the forest contains arrowheads, and other potential archeological finds.

Therefore, we urge the Planning Board to resolutely reject the proposed Lightstar Renewables Solar Farm on the agenda tonight. Although the term “solar farm” is not even mentioned once in our plan because it predates developers scouting our area to build them, a project like this is considered “inappropriate development” and would tarnish the rural character of the area, and disrupt scenic views for miles in every direction, including along the “Empire State Trail.”

In deciding whether a project benefits a town, we ask you to consider that those benefits are not always financial - sometimes it's about quality of life and the long-term preservation of the existing natural assets. These assets that literally give us life on this planet. Given the solar farm will be decommissioned in 25 years, it will take an entire century to grow that forest back. Yet from an environmental hazard perspective, we're looking at immediate effects, including:

- Massive wildlife decimation, including endangered species habitats by deforesting 24 acres of land;
- Run-off from deforestation and solar panel surfaces (although the newer panels pose far less of a threat) into Tuytenbridge Road and Route 9W;
- Polluted wetlands and soil erosion from the panel installation affecting our water table;
- An increase of greenhouse gases currently captured by the existing forest; and the insulting ill-logic of providing clean and renewable solar energy at the expense of a forest that already sequesters carbon that the developers seek to obviate. The middle term, obvious in the premises of the developer's reasoning but not in their conclusion, is their profit for 25 years (the useful life of current PV panels) after which our town is left with a decimated forest that was once a vibrant part of that ridge.



Keeping in mind that solar panels and trees are not at all equal, has Lightstar Renewables provided a greenhouse gas sequestration analysis or inventory for the 25-year life of the solar farm? Removal of trees that are larger than six inches in diameter should be minimal, according to NYSERDA's standards. Clearing 27 acres is not minimal. And what about accounting for the mining, transporting, and installation of the solar farm, adding more carbon to the environment during the building, with now fewer trees to offset the carbon emissions.

TownOfUlsterCitizens.org supports the installation of solar panel projects, and the environmental benefits of solar energy which includes cost savings to customers, and the tax base these projects can provide to our town. The Town of Ulster has plenty of commercial rooftops, parking lots and vacant parcels on which to locate solar panels without the need to fell a forest.

We're also urging you to be mindful about not segmenting the projects that are before this board currently, and looking at the ridge as a whole. For instance, on that same ridge, Whitestone Development Partners has proposed a 300+ Unit Multi-Family Housing Development above Adams Fairacre Farms.

Given the critical need for low-cost housing, building this oversized luxury development flies in the face of what the town really needs. Did you know that the white mansion on the hill, slated for demolition within the proposal is landmark worthy? Built in the 1890s, not only should it be preserved for its neoclassical architecture, but the fact that it was the former home of two Kingston mayors and a New York State senator and was formerly the Wolf Rock Hall Hotel – considered a respite for local travelers at the turn of the century. Our local history will all be obliterated by these proposed projects on the ridge.

And if that weren't enough, residents' health and quality of life will be compromised by 600 additional cars driving up that ridge to these townhomes, creating standstill traffic along 9W and more pollution from exhaust fumes concentrated at that intersection, and we'll have less forest to help sequester those emissions.

Neither of the recent traffic studies done at this intersection by the town or Whitestone Development Partners take into account peak shopping at Adams Fairacre Farms or overnight guests coming and going at a potential 100-room hotel about to be approved on the opposite side.

The point is, that segmenting these projects on the ridge and treating them as separate proposals does a disservice to Town of Ulster residents in the long-term, and dismisses the recommendations of our comprehensive plan, paid for with resident's tax dollars.

We need a new comprehensive plan in 2025 - preferably with modern carbon offset policies and sustainability practices, flooding mitigation and stormwater infrastructure – but in the meantime, the existing comprehensive plan minimally protects against the burden our citizens will bear for the next quarter century.

In summary, these projects on the ridge go hand in hand. We strongly urge you to categorically reject both projects in order to show that The Town of Ulster isn't for sale, and you will truly demonstrate your commitment to our residents' safety and quality of life.

Sincerely,

Laura Hartmann  
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TownofUlsterCitizens.org