

May 4, 2020

Operations Committee: 4-20-2020

RESOLUTION NO. 132-2020

ENCOURAGING ST. LAWRENCE COUNTY LAND OWNERS TO USE MARGINAL LANDS AND TO UTILIZE THE ADVICE OF THE SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT PRIOR TO THE SALE OF LANDS OR WHEN SIGNING LEASES FOR LARGE-SCALE SOLAR ARRAYS

By Mr. Denesha, Chair, Operations Committee
Co-Sponsored by Mr. Acres, District 8

WHEREAS, the market value of agricultural products grown in St. Lawrence County was \$191 million in 2017, and

WHEREAS, the success of the farming industry in the County relies on the availability of productive soils to grow food and products, and

WHEREAS, the presence of prime, and prime drained soils, is limited to nineteen percent (19%) of all land in St. Lawrence County, and

WHEREAS, large-scale solar arrays typically require five to seven acres of cleared, flat and dry land for every megawatt of power they generate, and

WHEREAS, the County Planning Board has reviewed fourteen (14) solar projects over the past decade that have or will displace 609 acres of farmland, and

WHEREAS, the rural character of St. Lawrence County, affordable real estate prices, the presence of high voltage transmission lines and the energy policies of the State will continue to attract the siting large-scale solar arrays on farmland,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Legislators encourages landowners to use their marginal lands and to utilize the advice of the Soil & Water Conservation District prior to the sale of lands or when signing leases for large-scale solar arrays, and to preserve productive farmland for future agricultural use, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that to allow for continued agricultural activity, solar developers are encouraged to design arrays so that sheep grazing and/or apiaries can occur at solar lease sites, and funding agencies, the St. Lawrence County Planning Board and municipal planning boards should recommend such design, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that solar developers, funding agencies and local governments are encouraged to arrange community solar agreements so that local residents and businesses can take advantage of lower electricity bills, and

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MEMORANDUM

Date: May 4, 2020
To: St. Lawrence County Board of Legislators
From: Robert G. Andrews, Chair
Re: Recommendations for Large-Scale Solar Arrays on Farmland

The St. Lawrence County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board (AFPB) has become increasingly concerned about the displacement of farmland to accommodate large-scale solar arrays. Some of these solar projects have taken agricultural land out of production and include parcels with prime soils, parcels that have been tile drained, and parcels that receive agriculture exemptions. While the county is the largest in the state based on geographic size, only 19% of the county's land consists of prime, and prime if drained soils. This equates to less than one acre of prime soils for every five acres available. These soils are needed by the county's farming industry to successfully grow food and agricultural products. When they are taken out of production, current and future farm operations are forced to use less productive soils, which makes these businesses and the overall farming industry less competitive.

Members of the Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board are acutely aware of the continued low milk prices that have financially hurt dairy operations and the employees and businesses they support. Our Board certainly understands that signing solar leases creates a stream of income that allows farmers to continue their businesses operations. When siting these arrays, however, the Ag and Farmland Protection Board feels farmland preservation should be considered; sites should be designed to allow for continued agricultural activities; and economic benefits should be extended to area residents and the communities who host these arrays. The Ag and Farmland Protection Board respectfully asks the Board of Legislators to consider the following resolution which includes the following recommendations:

- Encourage land owners to use their marginal lands for solar arrays, and to preserve their most productive farmland for continued agricultural use.
- Encourage solar developers to design arrays so that leased sites can be used for sheep grazing and apiaries, which are two agricultural activities that are compatible with solar development. Funding agencies, the St. Lawrence County Planning Board and municipal planning boards are also encouraged to recommend such design when reviewing these projects.

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- Encourage the signing of community solar agreements so that area residents and businesses can take advantage of reduced electricity bills when purchasing solar energy from a nearby array.
- Require Payments in Lieu of Taxes for large-scale solar arrays during their 15-year exemption so that local governments and school districts realize an economic benefit for hosting an array in their community.

If adopted, the Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board believes these recommendations help promote the continued viability of the county's farming industry, and yield an economic benefit for local governments when exemptions are sought for solar arrays.