About Saving Greene

Saving Greene: Citizens for Sensible Solar was formed in Coxsackie in early 2018, when local residents became aware that two utility-scale solar power plants had been proposed for the town. Both plants are classified as major electric generating facilities. Hecate Greene’s 800-acre Greene County Solar Facility will produce 50 megawatts of energy, and Hudson Energy Development’s 1,700-acre Flint Mine Solar plant will produce 100 megawatts.

These are not bucolic solar farms. If built today, these solar plants would be by far the largest in the Northeastern United States. In New England, by way of contrast, the largest plant generates just under 10 megawatts. Six additional large-scale solar projects are planned for the Town of Coxsackie.

What we oppose

Saving Greene strongly opposes the siting of the Greene County Solar Facility, which would be located in environmentally sensitive areas of a historic community with a thriving economy and natural beauty that makes it an increasingly popular tourist destination. The overwhelming footprint of this plant—especially in combination with the Flint Mine project—would completely change the appearance, character, and economy of the town.

Hundreds of acres of picturesque, highly productive farmland would become a sea of black glass. It is unlikely that Coxsackie would remain a tourist destination for anything beyond boasting the highest number of solar panels per capita in the Northeast. Property values around the plant sites are already falling as sellers scramble to find buyers willing to live in close proximity to the facility.

Hecate Greene insists that landscaping will block most views of the “low-profile” plant features, but they admit that some views cannot be concealed. Recently they admitted that they may use 15-foot panel structures instead of the “lower-profile” panels. The taller panels would be prominently visible from local homes, businesses, and roadways.

How the facility affects the environment

Portions of the sites comprise winter habitat for the endangered short-eared owl and threatened Northern Harrier hawk. The proposed siting of panels would make it impossible for these birds to hunt in their current habitat, and their prey would no longer have the winter food sources that summertime agricultural activity provides.

Additionally, the sites are located in part of the Atlantic Flyway; 14 bird species use this land during their annual migrations. Again, their habitat would be gone. The Hecate Greene sites are precariously close to wetlands ecosystems and habitat for other threatened and endangered species.

What this means for agriculture

The Hecate Greene plant is being built on some of the most productive farmland in Greene County. Ninety-five percent of the land being consumed is classified as “Prime Farmland/Prime Farmland If Drained,” or “Farmland of State Importance.” Only five percent of the land is classified as “Not Prime Farmland.”

Agriculture here is expanding here in response to increasing demand for local foods in the downstate area. Despite its size and widespread lack of productive soil, the county ranks 18th among 62 state counties for sweet corn production and 19th for vegetable, melon, potato, and sweet potato production.

The county cannot afford to lose the relatively small areas of productive farmland within its borders, but these are being devoured by solar development at an alarming rate. Few effects of 25-year solar panel siting on farmland have been studied, but the soil can be expected to lose significant amounts of carbon during that time.

It is unlikely that this land can or will ever be returned to agricultural use. The Department of Agriculture and Markets considers the siting of a long-term solar facility a permanent conversion of farmland to other land use.
Where this energy goes
Even the claim that the valuable solar energy produced by this facility will benefit New York State households and support New York’s Clean Energy Standard is only partly true. Forty percent of the energy from the Greene County Solar Facility will be sold to Connecticut-based utilities. None of the energy will be sold directly to local utility companies in our area.

What we support
Saving Greene advocates for building solar plants in sensible places such as brownfields and decommissioned power plants. There are many examples of appropriate siting in upstate New York, and plenty of land available for such development. But there are even more examples of needlessly wasted beautiful and productive farmland.

The scenery of upstate New York attracts tourists from all over the world, yet our state is abandoning its precious viewsheds, diverse agricultural resources, and fragile ecosystems in the race to see who can build the largest, most profitable “green” power plants.

What we’re up against
The Greene County Solar Facility offers little benefit to the Coxsackie community, but town residents have no direct say in whether it will be constructed here. Hecate Greene is pursuing siting under Article 10 of the New York State Public Service Law, a form of eminent domain that lets the developer and the state decide where the plant will go. Article 10 supersedes local laws and disregards the will of local municipalities.

This law puts siting decisions in the hands of the state and the developers, with little regard for the communities who will be forced to host these immense plants. It does this in the name of public need: the needs of other parts of the state that won’t have their land and communities irrevocably changed.

And let’s not forget that 40% of the energy produced by this plant serves Connecticut residents. We want to be good neighbors, but we shouldn’t have to ruin our land on their behalf.

Saving Greene is not a NIMBY group, as the unwavering support of our regional and local elected officials makes clear. We simply want developers to site plants in places where they belong rather than consume valuable land out of greed and a reckless disregard for the history, economic future, and natural beauty of our community. New York State is systematically destroying its scenic and agricultural assets in the name of producing renewable energy. We should not be ruining green in the name of green.

More utility-scale solar is proposed for the town of Coxsackie than for all of the counties on the east side of the Hudson River combined.

The Town of Coxsackie’s proposed capacity equals more than 75% of the solar projects installed in the entire state of Vermont. We have roughly the same amount of solar proposed here as is installed in Maine, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island combined. Our town’s proposed capacity represents over a third of what Connecticut currently produces.

Our proposed solar capacity is 12% of New York State’s currently installed solar total. If you add together the state’s current and proposed capacity over the next five years, our town would still be producing almost 4% of the state’s solar capacity.

*More on Article 10 and the NYS Department of Public Service: www.dps.ny.gov  Hecate 1, 2, & 3 (Matter Number: 17-02162), Flint Mine (Matter Number: 18-00390)