



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Michelle Hinchey

## Senators Hinchey and Harckham Send Letter to ORES Outlining Threats to Farmland and Environment by Proposed Copake Solar Development

MICHELLE HINCHEY August 25, 2023



As ORES Decision Period Draws Near, Chairs of Senate Agriculture and Environmental Conservation Committees Emphasize the Threat of Shepherd's Run Solar Facility on Ecologically Sensitive Areas and Critical Farmland in Columbia County, Advocate for Smart Solar Development

**COPAKE, NY** – Following a site visit in early August, New York State Senators Michelle Hinchey (SD-41) and Pete Harckham (SD-40) sent a letter to the Executive Director of the New York State Office of Renewable Energy Siting (ORES), Mr. Houtan Moaveni,

underscoring the potential adverse environmental and agricultural impacts of Shepherd's Run, a proposed 60-megawatt solar development seeking approval in the Town of Copake in rural Columbia County by Chicago-based Hecate Energy LLC. The Senators, who respectively chair the Senate Committees on Agriculture and Environmental Conservation, have joined the town's elected officials and residents in urging ORES to work with Hecate and local stakeholders to find a more suitable location for the project.

Hinchey, who represents Columbia County in the State Senate and serves as the Chair of the Agriculture Committee, invited Harckham, Chair of the Environmental Conservation Committee, to Copake for a site tour led by Copake Supervisor Jeanne Mettler and Deputy Supervisor Richard Wolf. Hecate Energy's proposal, which has been rejected three times previously by ORES due to a lack of information, is slated to engulf 216 acres of prime New York farmland, clear-cut 40 acres of forestland, encroach on Class 1 wetlands, and pose a risk to the drinking water of residents in the City of Hudson and the surrounding area due to its sited location on 21 wetlands and 9 protected streams. The proposed facility has also been sited on a FEMA-mapped 100-year flood zone with no clear mitigation plan identified by the developer as to how flood damage would be addressed. This Saturday, August 26, marks the end of the 60-day initial assessment period by which ORES will make a determination as to whether the project will proceed to its next phase of consideration.

"The urgent demand for increased renewable energy is undeniable, and as we navigate the intricate path toward a more sustainable future, we find ourselves at a pivotal moment where energy innovation and conservation must unite. We cannot exchange an energy crisis for a food crisis, a water crisis, or a conservation crisis, and these are the vital elements at risk when our lands of agricultural and environmental significance are inappropriately sited for development – as is the case here in Copake with the ill-proposed Shepherd's Run facility," **said Senate Agriculture Chair Michelle Hinchey.**

“Achieving a net-zero future while protecting our finite ecological resources are not goals that live in vacuums, but goals that we must balance for the future of our planet. I thank Senator Harckham for coming to Copake to see the scale of the issue firsthand and to the local officials and residents who have sounded the alarm and brought the potentially damaging impacts of the project to light. We urge ORES to recognize the elements at stake here in Copake and honor its own standards to mitigate adverse environmental and agricultural impacts in solar siting decisions.”

**Senator Pete Harckham, Chair of the Senate Environmental Conservation Committee, said,** “The effort to expand renewable energy production statewide, while vital, cannot come at the expense of environmentally-sensitive areas or valuable farmland. I join my colleague Senator Hinchey in opposition to Hecate Energy’s proposed solar project in the Town of Copake with the hope that other, more appropriate sites will be available for this endeavor.”

**Town of Copake Supervisor Jean Mettler said,** “Earlier this summer, we were delighted when Senator Michelle Hinchey and Senator Peter Harckham came to Copake to discuss the utility-scale solar installation proposed for our Town. Both senators understand our concern about the threats to prime farmland, wetlands, woodlands, and water posed by the Hecate project. We are deeply appreciative of the call by Senators Hinchey and Harckham to balance the need for renewable energy development with the need to protect our finite resources.”

Hinchey, who has been leading on solutions to facilitate smart solar development in New York State, [sponsors several pieces of legislation to address this challenge](#), which she will work to advance in the 2024 State Legislative Session. Two bills that passed both legislative houses in the 2023 Session and are ready to be called up to the Governor’s desk include the [Smart Integrated Tools For Energy Development \(SITED\) Act](#), which would require

NYSERDA to develop a Clean Energy Mapping Tool allowing communities to identify the local lands best suited for renewable energy siting and designating preferred spots for developers to search. Another bill would [establish an Agrivoltaics Research Program](#) administered by Cornell CALS to help guide the effective implementation of dual-use agricultural lands with solar arrays, helping New York meet its clean energy goals while preserving prime farmland.

**[The full text of the letter is available here.](#)**

###