

Zoning for Large Scale Solar Development

Village of Potsdam

§180, Article XII – Photovoltaic Siting Ordinance

Frederick Hanss, Director of Planning and Development

Here's What We'll Cover:

- The Challenge and Opportunity.
- Yikes! Now What!
- Evolution and Outcome.
- The Ordinance's Key Provisions.
- Words to the Wise.

The Challenge and Opportunity

- The Village of Potsdam's Zoning Law was out-of-date; the 2012-2022 Comprehensive Plan called for the law to be updated.
- An out-of-town developer proposed a 150 unit student rental housing project adjacent to the SUNY Potsdam campus including a “utility-scale” solar development.
- The proposed solar development was adjacent to an established single family residential neighborhood and a proposed high end residential development.

YIKES! Now What!

- From a zoning perspective, the Village was unprepared for this type of development.
- Village planning and code enforcement staff had little if any experience with utility-scale solar projects.
- Without guiding regulations, projects such as this one create uncertainty and anxiety.

Evolution and Outcome

- Key principles: Protection of existing property owners, preservation of historic properties; and, the desire to promote solar energy and provide a wide range of solar energy opportunities.
- Village Board adopted a six-month Moratorium on the development of utility-scale solar projects and tasked the Village Planning Board with studying the issue and drafting a photovoltaic siting ordinance.

Evolution and Outcome

- **Ace-in-the-Hole:** The Planning Board members included a commercial electrician, a contractor and several members with a good baseline understanding of the technology.
- Planning staff researched local laws, NYS' streamlined siting law, and finally settled on a model developed by Pace University as a starting point for a local ordinance.
- The Planning Board and staff worked through six draft laws before finally agreeing on a version that was referred to the Village Board of Trustees and ultimately adopted.

The Ordinance's Key Provisions

- Rooftop/building-mounted collectors are a standard use in all residential zoning districts.
- Installation of rooftop/building mounted collectors requires site plan approval in all other zoning districts.
- Installation of flush-mounted rooftop collectors within the Market Street National Historic Register District.
- Utility-scale developments permitted in the industrial, light industrial and R-3 zoning districts subject to a special use permit and site plan review.

Words to the Wise

- Be pro-active!
- Include the 8 components of a sound solar ordinance covered by Mr. Pfothenhauer!
- Go to: <https://ecode360.com/30555060> to view the Village ordinance

Thank You

- Frederick J. Hanss, Director of Planning and Development, Village of Potsdam
- (315) 265-1670
- fhanss@vi.potsdam.ny.us