



TOWN OF EAST WINDSOR

FIRST SELECTMAN JASON E. BOWSA

November 12, 2020

Melanie A. Bachman, Esq.
Executive Director
Connecticut Siting Council
10 Franklin Square
New Britain, CT 06051

Re: **Docket No. 492** – Gravel Pit Solar application for a Certificate of Environmental Compatibility and Public Need for the construction, maintenance and operation of a 120-megawatt AC solar photovoltaic electric generating facility on eight parcels generally located to the east and west of the Amtrak and Connecticut Rail Line, south of Apothecaries Hall Road and north of the South Windsor town boundary in East Windsor, Connecticut and associated electrical interconnection.

Dear Attorney Bachman:

The Town of East Windsor is in strong support of the above-referenced project, to be located in East Windsor. Clean, renewable energy projects such as Gravel Pit Solar are critical to the state's efforts to meet its renewable energy goal.

For many years, the site in question has served as an attractive nuisance for illicit activity, such as trespassing ATVs, underage drinking and the like, that the Town has not been able to curtail through conventional means. Appropriate reuse of the properties associated with this project, such as proposed by Gravel Pit Solar, will accomplish that goal. Gravel Pit Solar has been a collaborative partner with the Town of East Windsor since the inception of the project. They have taken the concerns of the municipality to heart and worked to mitigate those concerns throughout this process.

The project as proposed is large in scale and scope, and East Windsor is traditionally an agricultural community, but that does not mean that the proposed project is an incompatible use of the site. A portion of the subject parcel has been a tobacco farm for many years. Unfortunately, the tobacco industry in Connecticut is no longer anywhere near as profitable as it once was, causing the owners of the agricultural portion of the project to make the decision to shut down this portion of their farm (they have other locations that continue in farming and agriculture.) As part of their proposal, Gravel Pit Solar has indicated an interest in fostering pollinator habitat on the property and possible sheep grazing during the active life of the project. Gravel Pit Solar has also submitted an agricultural soil preservation plan and is considering ways it can permanently preserve the properties for agricultural uses at some point in the future when the solar project is done. East Windsor has a growing beekeeping community, and the expansive habitat in close proximity will help that community continue to thrive. At the end of the project's useful life, and after decommissioning, much of the property will be able to be returned to agricultural production.



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To help ensure the rural character of East Windsor at the conclusion of the project, and as part of our agreement with them, Gravel Pit Solar has made significant capital funding available to the Town, which could be used for the acquisition of development rights on other local farmland, if there is interest in the community.

Gravel Pit Solar has also worked closely with Town professional staff and with neighbors in proximity to the site to design a project as aesthetically pleasing as possible, so that it will not adversely impact the quality of life of abutting property owners.

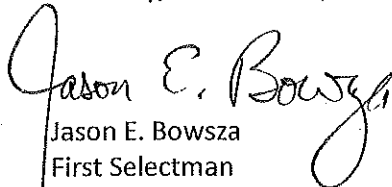
The Town notes comments submitted by stakeholders suggesting that this project "will likely put additional farms at risk for conversion to non-agricultural use, including development." The premise noted here is that individual property owners should not be able to make determinations about the future of property that they own – a premise that the Town rejects. A portion of the project as submitted is a gravel pit that is nearly completely excavated. There is insufficient infrastructure in the area to allow for any other useful redevelopment of the parcel, which would leave the property owner with very little option for an otherwise useless piece of property.

The Town also notes that the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) has raised concerns about the ratio of renewable energy projects to the number of acres of farmland preserved by the Department of Agriculture in 2019. The Department has ample resources available to it in its efforts to meet the state's competing goal of preserving agricultural lands in the state, and the ratio noted by CEQ is more likely attributable to the lack of adequate staff within the Department of Agriculture for preservation work, despite the availability of millions of dollars in Community Investment Act funds, bond funds, and federal reimbursements.

The Town maintains its support for the petition for Gravel Pit Solar because the project helps meet the state's renewable energy goals, it prevents sizable land in East Windsor from being permanently developed, and it grows our tax base with a project that doesn't burden already-strapped municipal services.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit writing in support of this application.

Sincerely,


Jason E. Bowsza
First Selectman