



STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
*CONNECTICUT SITING COUNCIL*

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**VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL**

April 23, 2020

TO: Parties and Intervenors

FROM: Melanie Bachman, Executive Director *MAB*

RE: **PETITION NO. 1397** - Constitution Solar, LLC petition for a declaratory ruling, pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes §4-176 and §16-50k, for the proposed construction, maintenance and operation of a 20-megawatt AC solar photovoltaic electric generating facility on approximately 149 acres comprised of four separate parcels located off of Cornell Road in Plainfield, Connecticut and associated electrical interconnection.

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Comments have been received from the Connecticut Department of Agriculture, dated April 22, 2020. A copy of the comments is attached for your review.

MB/RDM/lm

c: Council Members



# STATE OF CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Office of the Commissioner



Bryan P. Hurlburt  
Commissioner

860-713-2501  
[www.CTGrown.gov](http://www.CTGrown.gov)

April 22, 2020

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

Re: PETITION NO. 1397 - Constitution Solar, LLC petition for a declaratory ruling, pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes §4-176 and §16-50k, for the proposed construction, maintenance and operation of a 20-megawatt AC solar photovoltaic electric generating facility on approximately 149 acres comprised of four separate parcels located off of Cornell Road in Plainfield, Connecticut and associated electrical interconnection.

Dear Executive Director Bachman:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on this project, which as proposed will convert approximately 100 acres of Prime and Important Farmland Soils (see Figure 8 – soil map) to a 20 megawatt solar voltaic development.

As we have stated to the Connecticut Siting Council (CSC) in the past, prime and important farmland soils are recognized federal, state and locally significant natural resources. This part of our State has an active agricultural community with considerable competition for prime farmland for growing vegetables and fruit as well as other agricultural crops. Demand for farmland parcels of this size and quality, is high and its loss will undoubtedly have a negative impact on agricultural growth and viability.

In general, the loss of Connecticut farms significantly impacts our efforts to combat food insecurity, results in the importation of human food and animal feed from outside of our state and nation, increases food waste, and increases the distance from which we bring in our food, thus increasing our carbon footprint. It is commonly held that well managed agricultural lands can store significant carbon and can play an important role in climate change mitigation and adaptation. Further, the loss of farms and available farmland also affects the region's economy from retailers of farm equipment and supplies, to feed and fertilizer dealers and tourism.

In addition to taking agricultural lands out of production in the near term, the development of large solar facilities such as this one, (and the associated construction techniques and placement of other infrastructure) damage soil resources and have long term impacts on the potential for future agricultural productivity. Specifically, according to the petition, this project will remove at least 58 acres in agricultural fields from production, where the petitioner has reported that there are both feed corn and hay crops.

The Department recognizes that this project, given that it was selected as part of a solicitation prior to July 1, 2017, does not require a no impact letter from us to move forward in the declaratory ruling process. However, we offer these comments in hopes that the CSC can incorporate some of the same types of mitigation measures we have encouraged developers of much smaller projects to consider, either through their use of Department of Agriculture guidance (linked here: <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DOAG/Commissioner/200116-Solar-Project-Consideration-Guidelines.pdf?la=en>), and/or through the CSC process.

While the developer has submitted a Farmland Soil Mitigation Plan which addresses direct impacts and management of soils over the life of the project, it does not go nearly far enough in addressing the above cited issues, those that result from the loss of the farmland resource in the community. As other developers have already done when approaching DoAg for no impact letters, consideration could be given to incorporating real and significant mitigation measures such as restoring farmland using DoAg's Farmland Restoration Program, purchase of conservation easements on farmland elsewhere in the community and incorporation of dual-use agricultural activities. An example of these approaches is contained in the recent GRE decision which is linked here:

[https://www.ct.gov/csc/lib/csc/pending\\_petitions/3\\_petition\\_1301through1400/pe1378/pe1378-dcltr-energy-solar-stonington-20191011.pdf](https://www.ct.gov/csc/lib/csc/pending_petitions/3_petition_1301through1400/pe1378/pe1378-dcltr-energy-solar-stonington-20191011.pdf).

While the Department supports properly scaled renewable energy on farms and farmland where such projects are in concert with Connecticut's farmland protection goals and policies, projects such as this one pose a substantial impact on agriculture in our State and we can only address those impacts through a well thought out mitigation plan.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this project. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact either myself or Stephen Anderson of my staff. Steve can be reached at [stephen.anderson@ct.gov](mailto:stephen.anderson@ct.gov), or at (860) 713-2592.

Sincerely,



Bryan P. Hurlburt  
Commissioner

Cc: Katie Dykes, Commissioner  
Department of Energy and Environmental Protection