



COUNCIL ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

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Executive Director

September 22, 2021

Melanie Bachman, Executive Director
Connecticut Siting Council
Ten Franklin Square
New Britain, CT 06051

PETITION NO. 1463 – Greenskies Clean Energy, LLC petition for a declaratory ruling for the proposed construction, maintenance and operation of a 1.0-megawatt (MW) AC solar photovoltaic electric generating facility located at a Mulnite Farms, Inc. parcel off Wapping Road, and a 4.0 MW AC solar photovoltaic electric generating facility to be located at a Mulnite Farms, Inc. parcel off Miller Road, East Windsor, Connecticut, and associated electrical interconnection.

Dear Ms. Bachman:

The Council on Environmental Quality (“Council”) supports the development of clean, renewable energy technologies on appropriate sites in Connecticut. The Council offers the following comments regarding Petition 1463.

1. Prime Farmland Soils

The Petitioner states that the proposed sites are currently used for the cultivation of shade tobacco. If the proposed project is approved, the Petitioner proposes to use a portion of the proposed site for vegetable production (Wapping Road Site), sheep grazing and pollinator habitat. The Petitioner also states that it does “not expect there to be a reduction in acreage used for agricultural uses”. The Council recommends that the Petitioner provide more details regarding the proposed use of sheep for grazing (Solar Grazing Plan), including but not limited to the projected availability of sheep for such purposes. Further, the Council recommends that the Petitioner provide 1) additional details regarding the proposed co-use of the proposed site for crop production and 2) clarify the statement regarding no reduction in acreage used for agricultural purposes since it is proposed that vegetables would only be grown within the rows of the proposed solar panels on the Wapping Road site.

The Council is concerned about the possible loss of prime farmland, which has the “best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops”, and the impact the proposed construction will have on the prime farmland soils. East Windsor is an agricultural community close to the City of Hartford and a geographic area significant for soils and microclimate especially valuable for the production of crops. Additional losses of prime farmland such as what is proposed will have negative impacts on the viability of this food producing area. The continuing accretion of multiple individual decisions to site solar facilities on productive agricultural land has cumulative regional economic and ecological implications that go beyond the loss of prime soils.

The Council recommends that the proposed agricultural co-uses become conditions of approval, should the project be approved. Additionally, the Council recommends that no prime farmland soils be removed from the proposed sites and that best practices be employed during construction that might allow for a future restoration of those soils to productive agricultural use. These practices include minimizing grading, trenching and compaction of prime farmland soils.

2. Wildlife

The Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC) tool of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) identifies that the Northern Long-eared Bat and ten migratory birds may be present in the vicinity of the proposed project.¹ Consequently, the Council recommends that the Petitioner survey the proposed sites to assess the presence of any migratory bird species, identified by the USFWS, that might be present. If found, the Council recommends that the Applicant consult with the NDDDB and or the USFWS to develop and implement plans to eliminate or mitigate any potential adverse impacts to these migratory bird species. In addition, the Council recommends providing space at the bottom of the proposed perimeter fence to allow for the migration of small wildlife, if consistent with safety requirements.

The Council notes that the comments above address only certain elements of the materials provided by the Petitioner at the time of the filing. Additional information can become evident through comments offered by other parties and during the Siting Council's administrative hearing process. The absence of comment(s) by this Council about any Petition or Application, or any aspects thereof, may not be interpreted as an endorsement of a proposed project, or its components or that this Council might not have comments on more specific issues raised during the hearing process.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Peter Hearn". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Peter Hearn,
Executive Director

¹ The Petitioner surveyed for the wood thrush (*Hylocichla mustelina*), which was observed on May 26 and June 8, 2020. The Council notes that the bobolink, one of the ten identified migratory birds that might be present, prefers a habitat consisting of grassland.