



# STATE OF CONNECTICUT

## CONNECTICUT SITING COUNCIL

Ten Franklin Square, New Britain, CT 06051

Phone: (860) 827-2935 Fax: (860) 827-2950

E-Mail: [siting.council@ct.gov](mailto:siting.council@ct.gov)

[www.ct.gov/csc](http://www.ct.gov/csc)

June 26, 2018

TO: Parties and Intervenors

FROM: Melanie Bachman, Executive Director *MAB*

RE: **PETITION NO. 1345** – Pawcatuck Solar Center 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 15 MW AC solar photovoltaic electric generating facility on approximately 353 acres comprised of four abutting parcels located east of Pendleton Hill Road, north of the Pawcatuck River and south of Interstate-95 with proposed access from Ella Wheeler Road, and associated electrical interconnection to Eversource Energy's Shunock Substation west of Pendleton Hill Road in North Stonington, Connecticut.

---

Comments have been received from the State of Connecticut Department of Agriculture, dated June 25, 2018. A copy of the comments is attached for your review.

MB/RDM/lm

c: Council Members



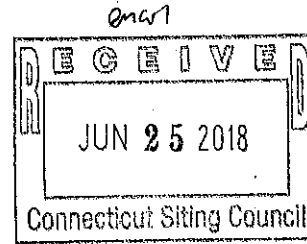
**STATE OF CONNECTICUT**  
**DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**  
 Office of the Commissioner



Steven K. Reviczky  
 Commissioner

June 25, 2018

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



860-713-2501  
 www.CTGrown.gov

Re: **PETITION NO. 1345:** – Pawcatuck Solar Center 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 15 MW AC solar photovoltaic electric generating facility on approximately 353 acres comprised of four abutting parcels located east of Pendleton Hill Road, north of the Pawcatuck River and south of Interstate-95 with proposed access from Ella Wheeler Road, and associated electrical interconnection to Eversource Energy’s Shunock Substation west of Pendleton Hill Road in North Stonington, Connecticut.

Dear Executive Director Bachman:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the above-referenced petition for declaratory ruling.

Prime and important farmland soils are recognized federal, state and locally significant natural resources. In general, the Department of Agriculture has concerns about large scale solar projects such as this one, those with the potential to take agricultural lands out of production in the near term and at the same time have long term impacts on potential future agricultural activity due to the associated construction techniques and placement of other infrastructure that can damage soil resources.

The area of our State where this project is located has an active agricultural community. The towns of North Stonington and Stonington have several thousand acres of farmland, and are home to numerous farms, some growing produce and others engaged in livestock and poultry production. Further, the State of Connecticut has made significant investment to protect farmland in this area, and we have purchased agricultural development rights on several farms, totaling hundreds of acres in these communities.

More specifically, we have the following concerns regarding this petition:

- 1) The petition should provide more in the way of assurances that the site will be returned to its pre-construction condition at the end of the project’s useful life. As such, the petition should include a detailed assessment of the existing farmland soils at the site. While the petition does mention on page 22 of Exhibit G (the Environmental Assessment) that “a

large portion of the site contains Prime Farmland soils”, there is not adequate mapping of the location of these soils on the site;

- 2) We would recommend the Siting Council consider requiring additional baseline soil testing to ascertain the physical, chemical and spatial characteristics of the soils on the property, so that a target can be set for restoration upon decommissioning with a goal of meeting or exceeding existing conditions. The USDA NRCS soil survey maps and attributes information can serve as a guide but are not a replacement for a detailed, site specific analysis in the development of a restoration plan.

The impacts from the use of heavy equipment at the site should also be examined and quantified. The use of heavy equipment during construction, holes from the installation of driven metal support posts, trenching for electrical conduit, surface grading, and the construction of access roads and equipment pads will significantly damage farmland soils and soil health. Changes to surface and subsurface soil hydrology are likely due to grading, access roads, trenching and compaction. All of these activities can have negative consequences for agricultural productivity due to the resulting uneven movement of water over and through the soils.

Assessment of the above cited impacts is necessary to provide guidance during construction, and for developing a plan for reclamation if and when the project is decommissioned.

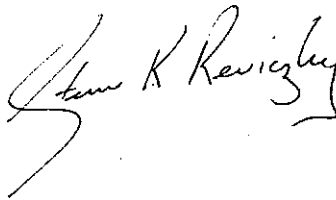
Examples of information that might be required for baseline testing and for restoration of farmland soils can be found in the USDA NRCS Practice Standard 544 (available at the following web address: <https://efotg.sc.egov.usda.gov/references/public/CO/CO544.pdf>), and in the U.S. Dept. of Interior’s Mine Land Reclamation Standards for Prime Farmland (available at the following web address: <https://www.osmre.gov/programs/tdt/primeFarmland.shtm>);

- 3) If the project does go forward, the Department of Agriculture believes the Siting Council should also consider requiring an “Agricultural Protection Plan,” as was required for at least one previous petitioner (DWW Solar II, LLC). A plan such as this would help reduce impacts to farmland soils during construction and operation of the facility, and could also include measures to ensure adequate restoration of the site at the end of the project’s useful life;
- 4) Lastly, with solar developments of this size which pose significant impacts to farmland resources, we believe more consideration should be given to the purchase of development rights/conservation easements on farmland elsewhere in the community, paying to restore farmland in the area or to some other farmland mitigation proposal.

In conclusion, we make these suggestions and recommendations in good faith, recognizing that this project was one of those selected by DEEP in a solicitation issued prior to July 1, 2017, and as such, does not require written representation for the Department of Agriculture as to whether it materially affects the status of prime farmland.

If you have any questions regarding these comments, please feel free to contact either myself or Stephen Anderson of my staff at (860) 713-2592, or by e-mail at [stephen.anderson@ct.gov](mailto:stephen.anderson@ct.gov). Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this petition.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steven K. Reviczky". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "S" and "R".

Steven K. Reviczky  
Commissioner

Cc: Stephen Anderson, Department of Agriculture