

Village of Caledonia Planning Board
Meeting Minutes for September 11, 2024

Public Hearing regarding Solar Installation at Upstate Breaker, 1 Technology Place

Members Present: Rhett Clark, Charles Martelle, Marge Landowski, Christopher Frank, Jay Barefoot

Member Absent: James Kemnitz

The meeting was opened at 6:30 pm. Chairman Rhett Clark stated the purpose of the meeting was a public information session regarding a solar project at Upstate Breaker, 1 Technology Place. This project does not require a public hearing, but the Planning Board feels that in doing so, there is a sense of transparency to the public. Mr. Clark also introduced members of the Planning Board, employees from GreenSpark Solar (Sean Mullen, Cody Primmer, Brad McKean), and Adam Schneider, owner of Upstate Breaker.

Motion by Jay Barefoot, seconded by Marge Landowski, to open the Public Hearing at 6:33 pm.
Aye: Rhett Clark, Charles Martelle, Marge Landowski, Christopher Frank, Jay Barefoot
Nay: None
Abstention: None

Rhett provided a timeline for this project:

- Public hearing tonight, 9/11; for informational purposes only. No decisions will be made.
- September Planning Board meeting, 9/17
- Board will review the information presented at the public hearing between now and the next Board meeting.
- October Planning Board meeting, 10/15; Board will have the option to approve, deny, or approve the project with modifications.

The GreenSpark team introduced themselves and provided a brief company overview. They also gave an overview of the project: 259 kW DC/250 kW AC; the boundary is .63 acres, with about .5 acre of solar panels; there will be 440 solar cells. The fence surrounding the solar array is 7' tall, per Village Solar Code.

At this point of the hearing, the Board and GreenSpark Energy answered questions from residents.

Guy Marble, 3238 State Street

Q: Were locations where you installed previous solar projects in villages, towns, cities?

A: (GreenSpark) yes

Q: Can the panels be installed on the roof?

A: No, due to structural engineering concerns, the panels could not be safely supported on the roof.

Mr. Marble also expressed concerns about the aesthetic of solar panels and stated that a letter should have been sent to all Village residents, not just those in a certain radius of the project.

Helen MacWilliams, 3194 Jane Street

Helen's mother lives on Maple Street

Q: Will the project extend onto Maple Street / reach the sidewalk?

A: (GreenSpark) no

Q: What happens if the solar array needs to expand?

A: (VOC PB) They will apply for project approval, just as they have done for this

Q: How will this affect houses on Maple Street, for example, their resale value? She also stated that she would prefer the overgrown grass to solar panels.

Q: Can the project be made to look better in the community?

A: (Rhett Clark) It will be at the corner of Maple Street/State Street, so the perimeter fence will be more visible than the solar panels.

Ms. MacWilliams also stated that this project was presented poorly to the public, but this meeting cleared it up. She added that a map showing street names, buildings, and a clear outline of the solar project would have alleviated many residents' concerns.

Mike Murphy, 3248 State Street

Q: Has GreenSpark installed in villages, and what local villages?

A: (GreenSpark) Yes, in Lima, behind the ambulance building. The difference there, though, is that the Lima project is a public project; the Caledonia proposal is a private business.

Q: Are the concrete pads still there?

A: (Adam Schneider) Yes, and they will not be removed. Where the solar panels are planned, there is no concrete.

Q: Is this project a way to open the door for more solar at this location?

A: (Rhett Clark) Any additional solar installation would require approval as a new project.

Mr. Murphy also stated he knows people who work for Upstate Breaker, and Adam treats his employees well, that they enjoy their job there.

Kate Gray, 3222 Philmore Ave

Mrs. Gray is a retired project manager. She stated that including information about GreenSpark and more information in the letter mailed to residents would have benefitted everyone.

Q: (to Adam Schneider) How successful is your business?

A: (Adam) It's a private, family-owned and run business.

Q: If the business closes, what happens to the solar array? And what happens if Adam chooses to sell the business?

A: (Adam) Adam outlined the success and growth of the business. He has grown to 50+ employees, invests in his buildings, company, and employees. He has invested millions of dollars into this site and has no plans to leave. He has no plans to sell.

A: (VOC PB) There is a decommissioning process that is followed for solar arrays. There is a bond in place to protect the Village.

Stuart Edwards, 3211 Hambro Park

Mr. Edwards stated he moved to a dead-end street for the quiet. There has been a drainage ditch and a gas line installed, and he requested a fence be installed around the retention pond to keep it safe.

He also stated the map sent with the Legal Notice only showed the property outline, not the outline of the proposed solar project.

Q: What happens when they outgrow the panels?

A: (GreenSpark) The panels are warranted 25 years, but can last 50.

Q: What about toxic soil?

A: (GreenSpark) There is none left behind. The panels are installed with galvanized screws, posts, and aluminum. The panels are made of aluminum, glass, silver, and silicone.

Rhett Clark reminded that the parcel is zoned Light Industrial. Of the permitted uses, solar is quiet, doesn't generate dust, and doesn't draw traffic. The inverters do have fans, but they are not loud.

Kelley McClenney, 331 Leicester St

Q: Has the soil been tested to see if it is clean?

A: (Adam Schneider) The land is clean, it had to be tested.

(Rhett Clark) Per Livingston County, DEC was involved

Q: Will there be fencing?

A: (Adam Schneider) There will be fencing around the entire project, per code.

Jim Bice, 3215 State Street

Q: What is to stop residential solar being installed?

A: (Rhett Clark) There is a process to follow, and it is outlined in the Village Code.

Q: What direction will the panels face?

A: (Adam Schneider) South

David Reed, 3211 Philmore Ave.

Mr. Reed expressed that Adam has done exactly as he has stated with any projects at his business.

Q: Where is the National Grid connection?

A: (GreenSpark) At the utility pole at the fence line.

Jenn McCowan, 363 Maple Street

Q: Are there batteries?

A: (GreenSpark) None

Q: There is a low amount of sunny days here. How do the panels charge?

A: They don't charge. They invert sunlight into electricity. On a snowy/rainy day, they will still collect power.

Q: What is the risk of arcing or fires?

A: The inverters are smart. If something is not working perfectly, they shut down.

Q: Is there additional training for the fire department?

A: They will need to know how to use a disconnect switch, but otherwise, no.

Q: Regarding expansion: How far away from the business can the solar panels be?

A: Upstate Breaker has a lot of storage space, and plans to add more storage space but not more solar panels.

John Pike, 3212 State Street, Apt. B

He confirmed that there is a setback requirement for the fence on Maple Street/State Street, and added that there is also a limit to how much can be placed on a property. Setbacks and codes are in place for a reason.

Kristen Murphy, 3248 State Street

The Planning Board can require shrubbery/vegetation to cover some of the fencing.

Rhett Clark: We do need to adhere to code, but there is a bit of leeway.

Mayor Scott DiLiberto

There is a decommissioning plan, which is attached to a bond. The Village will rely on an attorney to advise and manage. JP Schepp added that there is generally an escalator in a bond to accommodate any rising costs; there is a term to a bond, and it is held in the name of the Village.

JP Schepp, Village Engineer, spoke about the scale of the project:

The CRC project on the West side of town is 5 megawatt. The solar installation at 5 & 20 is also 5 megawatt. This proposed project is .25 megawatt and is a relatively small array.

Christopher Frank, Planning Board Member:

Q: How far from the road will the panels be placed?

A: (GreenSpark) At least 100 feet.

A: (Rhett Clark) asked for a pole to be installed at the corner of Maple Street/State Street to show how far the project would extend.

Bill White, 3267 State Street

Q: Will this allow Upstate Breaker to be power neutral?

A: (Adam Schneider) Any extra power will be fed into the grid.

The next Planning Board meeting will be held on Tuesday 9/17. All are welcome and the Board appreciates comments and feedback.

Motion by Christopher Frank, seconded by Jay Barefoot, to close the public hearing at 7:33 pm.

Aye: Rhett Clark, Charles Martelle, Marge Landowski, Christopher Frank, Jay Barefoot

Nay: None

Abstention: None

Elizabeth Dietrich

Secretary, Village of Caledonia Planning Board