



FCWC

Federated Conservationists
of Westchester County

August 5, 2021

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MONIKA KERSCHUS-GRANHOLM

Chairman Michel McLaughlin
Planning Board Town of Mount Pleasant, New York
VIA EMAIL C/O Carolyn Saracino at csaracino@mtpleasantny.com

Re: Gates of Heaven 5 MW Solar Project

Dear Chairman McLaughlin:

The mission of the Federated Conservationists of Westchester County (FCWC) is to educate, advocate and bring together voices to protect and preserve the natural resources and environment in Westchester County and to address climate change. FCWC is therefore working diligently to promote the adoption of fossil-fuel-free energy in our County while balancing that goal with protection of our county's natural resources and biodiversity. In the past year, FCWC has co-hosted several county-wide discussions on solar siting. Through these discussions with many municipal planning board members, elected officials and environmental advocates, we have found that the most controversial issue around solar siting arises when a proposal involves installation on natural areas where existing habitat would be removed or seriously impacted.

FCWC is concerned that the necessary environmental review has not been completed for this application.

The wetlands information was limited to mapping designated wetlands on the property. There was a mention of vernal pools but because vernal pools are not regulated by the state, there was no information about the species that may be using those vernal pools. There was no information about wildlife surveys done on the site.

Wildlife information consisted of the state lists of Endangered and Threatened species. An adequate EIS should include a wildlife survey done at several times during the year - for mammals, birds, herbs (salamanders, frogs, turtles, etc.) - to capture migrating and resident animals. All of the groups indicated are declining and preserving biodiversity is as essential as capturing carbon.

Furthermore, when trees are removed the remaining forest is impacted and more open to storm damage, etc. that should be addressed.

Finally, the landscaping plans are inadequate. All landscaping should only include native trees, shrubs and plants.



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In light of this inadequate environmental review, FCWC urges that this development proposal be denied until completion of the necessary studies and determinations have been made.

FCWC holds that addressing climate change requires both the replacement of fossil fuel with clean energy *and also* protection of remaining natural and wilderness areas to provide wildlife, insects and plant species refuge and sustenance in the face of floods, fires, drought, heat waves and other effects of climate change.

We appreciate the challenge of balancing the need to develop clean energy quickly and effectively with the need to protect environmental resiliency and biodiversity. The Gates of Heaven proposal is a clear example of the need for careful calibration and balancing of the benefit of potential clean energy production with the thorough and complete evaluation of the impact the development will have on wildlife and biodiversity.

Respectfully submitted,

Carol Durst-Wertheim
President
Federated Conservationists of Westchester County