



Elisabeth Haub School of Law  
78 North Broadway  
White Plains, NY 10603

June 1, 2021

Chairman Michel McLaughlin  
Planning Board  
Town of Mount Pleasant, New York

VIA EMAIL C/O Carolyn Saracino at [csaracino@mtpleasantny.com](mailto:csaracino@mtpleasantny.com)

Re: Gates of Heaven 5 MW Solar Project

Dear Chairman McLaughlin:

The Pace Energy and Climate Center wishes to withdraw our letter to you dated May 17, 2021, concerning the Mount Pleasant Planning Board's evaluation of the Gates of Heaven proposed 5 MW solar project.

In our May 17 letter, we sought to remind the Planning Board of the importance of local renewable energy to further New York State's decarbonization goals. In our letter, we recognized that the Planning Board must balance the potential for this project to deliver clean power along with all other considerations that this and future projects following its precedent may present.

Since our May 17 letter, the Town of Mount Pleasant provided, and we have reviewed, the proposed project site diagram, environmental impact analysis and other documents in the public file showing that the project will cut down approximately 26 acres of healthy forest on the Gates of Heaven property. We previously had not been provided with this information, and we were unaware of the extent of the proposed tree removal.

In transitioning Mount Pleasant towards sustainability, the production of clean power and the conservation of flora and fauna are both important considerations, and it is essential that local communities deploy clean energy in a manner that safeguards natural resources such as forests. While recognizing the importance of advancing solar in New York State, the Pace Energy and Climate Center does not recommend clearcutting healthy tree stands to clear land to install solar PV arrays. Trees are important for sequestering carbon, and also for protecting biodiversity, preventing heat island effects, and providing a healthy environment in urban and suburban areas. Biodiversity is especially difficult to quantify and track, cannot be directly valued against other metrics like carbon reductions, and, as a result, is chronically undervalued, contributing to ecosystem losses. Given that biodiversity is severely at risk and that many decades are required to fully replace all the environmental services provided by mature tree stands, tree removal should only be done sparingly.

Importantly, other options for siting renewable energy on non-forest land remain widely available, without clearcutting tree stands and its negative impacts to biodiversity. Rooftop solar is one example. We urge developers, utilities and municipalities to pursue these other options.

As reflected in our prior letter, the Planning Board has an important mission in evaluating and deciding whether to approve projects. You are among the first planning boards to make such difficult decisions and we wish all parties the best in reaching a decision appropriate for Mount Pleasant that supports a sustainable future.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'CH' or similar initials, written in a cursive style.

Craig Hart, Ph.D.  
Executive Director  
Pace Energy and Climate Center

Cc: John Cahill, Archdiocese of New York  
Peter Smith, Pataki-Cahill Group  
Martin Susz, Archdiocese of New York  
Mr. Steven Kavee, Town of Mount Pleasant Conservation Advisory Council