

8/7/2025

LETTER TO ANCRAM TOWN BOARD & RESIDENTS

RE: PROPOSED INDUSTRIAL SOLAR PROJECT - RT 82, ANCRAM

Hillrock Farm & Distillery, located on Pooles Hill Rd is a family owned & operated agricultural business which farms over 800 acres and employs more than 15 people locally. In addition, Hillrock utilizes numerous local service providers and attracts several thousand visitors to the area every year, generating significant economic benefit to local businesses. We support sustainable energy initiatives, but also care deeply about preserving Ancram's farming heritage and the bucolic rural landscape that is so critical to attracting tax paying residents and viable business such as ours.

The ~ 10 acre solar farm proposed by Ancram PV, LLC is located on 90 acres of largely prime farmland on Rt 82 adjacent to one of the oldest family farms in the country and will be visible for several miles along the scenic ridgeline to the south west of the site.

This proposed industrial development is in stark contrast to the surrounding rolling farmland and requires a special use permit. As such, the Town is tasked with making a careful and fully informed decision as this precious rural farm landscape would be very materially damaged by the project.

ANCRAM SOLAR LAW INTENT & REQUIREMENTS:

The Ancram Solar law adopted in 2022, clearly articulates that "Pursuant to the Town of Ancram Comprehensive Plan, Ancram has established an overall policy establishing its desire to maintain its predominantly rural character, preserve agricultural landscapes, open space, important scenic views, and infrastructure appropriate for a small, rural town." Solar projects over 10 acres are automatically deemed "inconsistent with the rural character of the community." Solar projects under 10 acres are permitted under a special use permit, only if they meet the requirements of the law, of which key points are summarized below:

Part 5 (a) Purpose and Intent:

"(b) encourage the siting of solar energy systems in a way that preserves and protects community character... and prime farmlands."

"(e). ensure that such systems will not have a significant adverse impact on the environment, including on aesthetic qualities and rural character of the Town."

Part 5 (c) General Design and Siting Requirements:

"1. All solar collectors and related equipment shall be placed and arranged such that reflected solar radiation or glare shall not be directed onto adjacent properties or public roadways."

"4. Any on-site power lines shall be underground installations."

“5. The proposed project shall be consistent with the adopted Town of Ancram Comprehensive Plan.”

Part 5 (g) Community-Scale Solar Energy Systems Shall Include:

“(4.c) The character and appearance of the proposed project shall be in general harmony with the character and appearance of the surrounding neighborhood and shall not detract from the scenic qualities, rural character, and visual qualities of Ancram’s landscape and historic character.”

“(3,i) Accurate photo simulations shall be included showing the proposed solar energy system....from multiple angles for all key locations identified as may be directed by the Planning Board. Key viewpoints including existing tree lines, surrounding topography, and proposed elevations shall be required.”

PROJECT FACTS / BENEFITS TO THE TOWN:

In the 7/23/25 Community Meeting with RIC Development, several facts were clarified by Rob Queirolo, project manager as follows:

THERE IS NO GUARANTEE OF ANY POWER COST SAVINGS FROM THE PROJECT FOR ANCRAM RESIDENTS:

- RIC Solar would sell power from the Project and has no control once the power goes into the Central Hudson grid.
- No discount or savings of power costs for Ancram residents is guaranteed by RIC Solar or Central Hudson.
- Savings, if any, would be determined by Central Hudson at some future date after completion of the project.

ASSUMING NO RE TAX ABATEMENT IS GRANTED, THE DEVELOPER ESTIMATES THE PROJECT WOULD GENERATE \$7,000 OR LESS IN ANNUAL RE TAXES FOR THE TOWN.

- Real Estate Taxes were cited by the Developer as a benefit to Ancram residents. When asked about this, the Developer stated that any RE Tax would be negotiated later with the Town.
- The developers estimated property tax, assuming no abatement, was \$5,000-7,000 annually (significantly less than what many of the local residents at the meeting are currently paying).
- Based on comments from residents at the recent community meeting, more than 12 homes in the neighborhood would be negatively impacted by the proposed solar development. Based on public tax records, the Taxable Value for these properties equals ~ \$12 million, generating estimated property tax revenue ~ \$175,000 annually.

- Reduction of neighborhood property values directly impacted by the proposed solar project could have a very material negative impact on Town of Ancram, requiring tax increases on Town residents not directly impacted by the project.
- In addition, the resulting damage from the project to the Town's rural character and visual resources could make Ancram less attractive to future residents and businesses, further eroding property values and property tax revenue overall.

ITEMS TO BE ADDRESSED BY THE DEVELOPER & TOWN INCLUDE:

1. INCORRECT/MISLEADING ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT DISCLOSURE:

- The Environmental Assessment Form submitted by the Developer states that "The Project site is not visible from any officially designated Federal, State, or local scenic or aesthetic resource or other public vantage points."
- In fact, this statement is incorrect and highly misleading. The project would be clearly visible for several miles along the facing ridgeline including sections of Cottontail Road, which is designated in the Ancram Comprehensive Plan as an "Identified Scenic Area".
- **The Developer must be required to correct and re-file accurate Environmental and Visual Assessments for the proposed project.**

2. POTENTIAL GLARE POLLUTION:

- While we understand that the project's ~ 10 acres of glass solar panels will have a special coating, experts say "Solar panels can effectively absorb vertically incident light, but they are prone to generating glare pollution when sunlight is at a low angle."
- Developer reported in the June 5th meeting that they have not completed a glare study, but is willing to complete one.
- **Given that the panels will be visible for several miles along the facing ridgeline a glare study should be completed and residents should be given assurances that their properties will not be negatively impacted by glare.**

3. DECOMMISSIONING RISK:

- At the end of its 35 year useful life, the Solar Farm will need to be dismantled and the disturbed farmland returned to its original condition. Installation of the 2000+ panels will require foundations, roads and electrical equipment which will require removal. The Department of Agriculture and Markets also requires that disturbed soil must de-compacted and topsoil is to be replaced.
- The developer's Decommissioning Plan has an estimated budget of \$163,000 based upon current costs and uses a 2% annual inflation rate for 35 years to arrive at a \$479,385 Bond Amount to cover this cost. If the panels are deemed hazardous waste the cost disposal will be much higher than estimated by the developer.
- A qualified independent 3rd party should evaluate the estimated decommissioning costs and potential designation of panels as hazardous waste. In addition, a higher assumed inflation rate in line with historical averages should be used to establish the required bond amount.
- **Assuming the actual 20 year historical USA inflation rate of 2.46% and revised current decommissioning costs of \$250,000, the required bond amount would be over \$2,000,000 vs the current proposed \$479,000 bond.**

4. COMPLETION RISK:

- The Project is to be developed by Ancram PV, LLC, a special purpose company with limited assets. Solar Projects typically receive material government subsidies including tax credits worth as much as 30% of project costs which may be lost under the One Big Beautiful Bill Act signed into law by President Trump on July 4th, which significantly rolls back many of the core tax incentives that solar energy projects have relied on historically.
- **The Developer should provide details of their project financing and a completion bond should be considered to ensure that if construction of the project is initiated it will in fact be completed.**

5. TAX EXEMPTION:

- It is understood that the project may be granted a Real Estate Tax Abatement by the Town of Ancram, despite the fact that the project will not generate any material ongoing jobs in the Town.

- **The Developer should be required provide an explanation of any material economic benefits to be generated for the Town's residents. If tangible benefits such as permanent jobs do not reasonably justify abatement, then an abatement should not be granted.**

6. SITE PLAN MODIFICATION TO MINIMIZE NEGATIVE IMPACTS:

- The proposed ~ 10 Acre Solar Panel Array is located on a long South-West facing open hillside to the North of Rt 82. Do to the exposed location, existing & planned screening will be ineffective at masking the project for several miles of facing ridgeline to the South/East of the site.
- **During the recent 7/23 community meeting, the developer agreed to explore alternative locations on the site where screening would be more effective and visual damage could be reduced.**
- **If the project is to proceed, the Developer and Town should work with the impacted neighbors to relocate the panels to a more protected area of the site which can be effectively screened.**