

Tompkins County Industrial Development Agency

Administration provided by Ithaca Area Economic Development

Minutes of Public Hearing

NSF Enfield Sites 1, 2, &3
August 10, 2021 @ 11:00am
Town of Enfield Courthouse
182 Enfield Main Road

Present: Heather McDaniel (for Tompkins County IDA), Rich John (TCIDA Board), David Norbut (Norbut Solar Farms), Ina Arthur, Margaret Frank, Hailey Aldrich (IAED), Stephanie Redmond, Robert Lynch, Ann Rider (Speakers)

1. Heather McDaniel called the public hearing to order at 11:00am.
2. Heather McDaniel gave an overview of the project and the proposed incentive.
3. Public comment was heard from the following speakers:

Stephanie Redmond, Supervisor Town of Enfield – Ms. Redmond stated that she is in support of the solar facility however, a host community agreement (HCA) would help support the Town of Enfield’s finances. She understands that the TCIDA wants to keep the PILOT agreement to the original amount as outlined in the IDA’s Solar Policy. She would urge the TCIDA Board to either pull money from the PILOT amount to support a HCA for the Town of Enfield or to require a HCA in addition to the PILOT. Ms. Redmond also commented that she feels that public input has not been forthcoming as many from the Town of Enfield are used to participating via zoom conference and that there was no zoom made available at this hearing.

Robert Lynch, Councilperson, Town of Enfield – I am Robert Lynch of 175 Gray Road, Town of Enfield, a Councilperson on the Enfield Town Board. I address the TCIDA today not as a spokesperson for my Board, but merely as one of its members, and as a 50-plus year resident of the Town of Enfield.

I reiterate the position our Town Board by its members present unanimously adopted on June 9th. We stated: “The proposed Agreement [the one on the table today] would provide the Town of Enfield inadequate compensation in lieu of tax. We [the Board] request that the TCIDA include a requisite \$1,200 per Megawatt Host Community payment to the Town of Enfield as a condition of the PILOT agreement.”

What is before this hearing today fails to provide a Host Community Agreement. Norbut Solar claims it cannot afford to make such a payment at the PILOT amounts your Agency proposes and demands. Therefore, I, speaking personally, would walk away from what’s on the table today.

Allow me to address a financial point raised by Norbut’s president at your Agency’s July 14th meeting. David Norbut would have us believe that by rejecting this PILOT, Enfield and two other taxing authorities would in aggregate forfeit more than \$2 Million in tax revenue over the PILOT’s 30-year life. He compares cast-in-stone PILOT revenues to projected tax receipts of what the currently vacant land might earn remaining undeveloped and at both its current assessment and municipal tax rates.

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Mr. Norbut's comparison employs three flawed assumptions: First, that the site would forever remain waste land; second that its assessment would never rise; and third, that neither would local tax rates. All three assumptions depart from the real-world path of history. Properties appreciate. Tax rates change.

Last month I cautioned our Town Board that instead of landing in a "sweet spot," solar farm compensation in summer 2021 stands in a "sour spot." The State has exhausted its incentives. NYSEDA won't prime the pump. Thus, new solar farms like this one won't get built unless towns like Enfield – and their residents and taxpayers – take it on the chin and accept much less revenue to compensate for someone else's failure to act responsibly. Yes, we want Green Energy. I do. But not when only we – not Norbut, nor the IDA – incurs entrepreneurial risk.

I can't justify the terms of this PILOT to the people who elected me. My colleague Jude Lemke forecasts Washington's Infrastructure bill could send more money Solar's way very soon and pull us out of this sour spot. I share her optimism. To approve this bare-bones PILOT now is to bind our taxpayers into 30 years of burden and buyer's remorse. I cannot so encumber them, or their children. That, Norbut Solar and the Tompkins County IDA, is Robert Lynch's bottom line. Thank you.

Ann Rider – 77 Halsey Street, Trumansburg, NY – Ms. Rider asked for clarification of the terms of the PILOT – has it been negotiated or not. Ms. McDaniel clarified that the applicant has requested a deviation from the IDA's standard solar PILOT. The IDA is leaning towards requiring the parameters that are in their off-site community solar policy which would be \$4,200/mw PILOT - so that is what is on the table today. There will be further discussion at the TCIDA Board meeting tomorrow where they could take up a vote on this project.

Ms. Rider commented that this is then Norbut requesting a deviation from the standard PILOT that the IDA does with solar projects.

I am supportive of PILOTs with alternative energy projects in rural areas. This is an old policy and it does bring development to rural places over the long haul. They have been beneficial. At the beginning, the Town does not get as much revenue as they will in the end. Let's remember that the land is being leased and that it is farmland, and the owner is getting a farm exemption that means they pay less taxes on that farmland. She stated that it is not good farmland (not prime farmland). The IDA has so much expertise and I respect them for that. Their expertise is beyond reproach, and we are fortunate to have this. I would trust their judgement. They are, bottom line, for the residents of Tompkins County and very skillful at keeping things even.

4. The hearing was adjourned at 11:17am.