

SOLAR ENERGY – SOLAR FARMS (COMMERCIAL OPERATIONS)

Alternative energy is certainly a topic that has been in the news a lot the past few years as options are considered for lessening dependence on fossil fuel based energy systems. Solar energy is certainly one option that appears to be picking up momentum throughout the Upstate New York region in part due to the availability of equipment and installers; as well as, financial assistance in some cases for the equipment.

The Town of Canandaigua welcomes options for solar energy; however, those options must be in keeping with New York State and local codes. Actually, Town of Canandaigua Town Code Chapter 220, Section 2; specifically states the purpose of the Town of Canandaigua's zoning chapter is to in part provide for solar access and the implementation of solar energy systems.

In 2015 the Development Office of the Town of Canandaigua adopted the uniform Solar Building Permit Application from NY-SUN in order to assist installers and applicants for small scale solar projects. These projects are the traditional roof mounted solar panels less than 12kw. Like the Town of Canandaigua, many municipalities have adopted this uniform building permit application for ease and simplicity in making application for a roof mounted system. When an installer is able to utilize the same exact building permit application from one town to the next, he/she becomes familiar with the requirements and is able to efficiently make application and install solar energy roof mounted systems.

Ground mounted solar systems, for the purpose of providing solar energy to the home or building on the same parcel, are treated as accessory structures in the Town of Canandaigua. These are the units that are traditionally on a pole or base and mounted to the ground. Some of them turn automatically to stay in the sunlight as much as possible during the course of a day. These accessory structures must meet Town of Canandaigua zoning regulations including setbacks, size, and percentage of coverage of the lot if applicable.

Large scale solar energy facility operations for the purpose of net-metering are considered commercial industrial operations at this time in the Town of Canandaigua. Net-metering operators have recently contacted landowners throughout the Town of Canandaigua for the purpose of installing large scale solar facilities to capture solar energy, and spin the electric meter backwards (net-metering) selling solar power back to our electric grid. Since the solar energy is not being consumed on the particular parcel, the operation is considered a commercial industrial operation and is not permitted currently in the Town of Canandaigua in many of our zoning districts including many of our open farm lands. These types of operations could possibly be considered in commercial areas, or perhaps industrial areas with special approval by the Town of Canandaigua Planning Board.

In the coming months, NY-SUN is anticipated to share with local municipalities model legislation for consideration of the placement of solar energy facilities in communities. Larger net-metering operations will have to be considered by every municipality in the State of New York to determine best possible land-use. Some municipalities have already expressed concern about the changeover of agriculture or farm land to commercial solar energy facilities.

Rest assured, any proposed local laws being reviewed for consideration in the Town of Canandaigua will include a public hearing and an opportunity for residents to provide their voices as part of the process.