

Invenergy held a public open house on August 3 at the Saranac High School Cafeteria.

It was for people to see the items they brought and to ask questions from the various specialists. Here is a summary of the questions I asked and the answers. Most of these are what is being asked by the residents of the Township. Many myths were debunked. New information was shared. I spent quite a long time with an engineer, but they had other specialists there too. I also emailed some questions.

There was a sample solar panel to be touched and looked over. It was approximately 3' by 6' and about one inch thick. It is made up of aluminum frame and edges with silicon "sort of little circuit lines" surrounded by tempered glass. The glass does not have any coating on it. If something broke a chunk of it, the glass would crumble in that spot. Sensors would send a message to the workers to check on it. There is no liquid in them so nothing to spill or contaminate the ground. The EPA has classified the panels as "nonhazardous". They are not toxic. Lab testing of solar panels has been done to ensure nothing would be leached into the soil if a panel is damaged. A small amount of heat reflects off them in the summer on a hot day similar to the heat on a dark colored car or asphalt then it dissipates in the same way. The panels rotate from sun up to sun down to gather the most sunlight during the day. In this geographic area the top edges of the panels are typically about 15 feet high. The expected life of them is estimated at about 35 years.

There is very little that can catch fire or burn in the panels. A fire could start with a short circuit like in a kitchen appliance. If there was something that happened in a larger scale, sensors would send a warning message and shuts off that group of arrays. If it was a fire, then it is difficult to spread. The company will meet with the Fire Dept to see if they need any training or materials. Typically, a fire retardant is used and no special equipment is needed.

The panels are bolted to metal racks onto steel posts that are driven into the ground to an appropriate depth for the weight and frost. Rainwater will run off them, so they plant deep rooted vegetation under and around them to soak up rain and prevent erosion. The company will need a soil erosion permit and a stormwater review by the County Drain Commission. They develop and implement a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan to minimize impacts to current stormwater drainage patterns during construction and operation of the project. Sometimes there some mowing but others plant and grow wildflowers and bee hives are put out there for honey production. They brought little jars of honey to hand out and served pizza and drinks as it was in the supper range time.

Approximately every 30,000 to 50,000 panels needs an inverter and they keep them to the inside areas as they do have a humming sound, but it is not loud and usually cannot be heard outside the setbacks.

Of the approximately 2700 acres leased, approximately 800 acres will be located within the open fenced boundaries. Then within the fenced boundary between 30% - 42% will be physically covered with solar panels. The panel coverage is much smaller than the parcel leases. They would like a little more panel coverage acreage in land leases to get the right amount of electricity production of 100 megawatts. They want open land. It costs too much to cut down wooded areas and most landowners would not want that.

Easements are also sought from landowners to run the higher voltage lines across the properties to other leased properties or a substation or high tension lines. The lease allows the land to stay with the ownership of the property. Owners can use the land any way they want in the upfront development term phase. Then once construction begins the owner will no longer be allowed to farm or graze the open leased land as the equipment is then being constructed.

Fencing is typically 6-7 feet high or what the ordinance requires. They have done some projects that are surrounded by wildlife-friendly deer fencing which is nicer to look at and safe for wildlife.

Most of the material in the panels is recycled such as the glass and aluminum. Silicon is more challenging to recycle but there is a growing market for recycled solar panels including the raw material inputs from the panels.

It was interesting to know the panels do not cover the full 2700 acres but a much smaller amount than that. I hope that this information will help settle the fears and myths.

Zoning Administrator
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