

## Projected Solar Farm Questions

Keene Township Resident

My Property is not next to the proposed solar fields right NOW. I estimate our home is approximately 250 yards from the Property which does border one of the parcels. So it is very close. Township personnel do not know who has signed leases unless a property owner has told some of the people. The leased lands need to be near high powered lines or a substation.

Because the Zoning Ordinance now opens the door for Solar Farms all over Keene Township, I am concerned. Questions/Comments as follows: The solar energy ordinance was adopted in 2018 because people wanted to put in residential systems. We must provide for legal uses if requested. Solar farms can only be in the AG and AR zoning districts on 5 or more acres and the RR zoning district of parcels over 40 acres. They cannot be placed in the LDR, C or I districts.

1. There is some confusion regarding the information posted on your website and in your minutes. See below

\*Note that the solar energy amendments are based on the previous solar energy ordinance that was adopted on 10-9-2018 because many homeowners want to put in a solar system and a more flexible process was preferred. A couple of changes were proposed for the commercial energy section for clarification but those were not adopted and the commercial section was sent back to the Planning Commission for additional work.

The way this is written it appears that the solar energy amendments adopted on 10-9-2018 are for homeowners (single family homes, not farmland) Yet the Ordinance voted on March 2022 appears to accommodate much larger scale Solar Farms. Is the March 2022 the final Ordinance regarding Commercial Solar Energy or is the PC doing additional work to expand it further? The above paragraph was added to clarify all the questions about the solar energy ordinance. Many people thought the March ordinance was the first one. The 2018 ordinance was primarily for home property use with small by right systems and large systems (for all homes or farm use) but we also added a solar farm section to protect the township with regulations. The amendments in 2022 are also primarily for home property use, farm use or business use to make the process for a system much easier and faster to get a permit. We created a medium size system that will be obtained as a zoning permit for most average home sizes. The large system would be for a large home or farm or business that needs a much larger system and remains as a special use. Only a few clarifications were made to the existing commercial solar farm section but were not adopted and more work will be done on that section. The Planning Commission will work on more language to be added to the commercial solar farm

section in the future meetings.

2. In consideration of how contentious this (Solar Farms) is. Now that people are becoming aware of it, a Pause or hold should be officially enacted during which time a workshop/education day is offered so citizens can inquire as to how this

came about, detailed specifics on how the planning commission created the ordinance, and what experts were consulted to explore Pro's and Con's of Solar Farms, *OTHER* than the Invenergy Analyst. The Township had no idea this would be contentious as only a few people came to the 2018 public hearing and they were in favor of solar energy. The Township cannot put a "hold or pause" on this because we already have an ordinance in place. Why the ordinance and the amendments came about is explained above. Most Townships have adopted solar energy ordinances as they are legal uses and we must provide for legal uses when requested for them. We used other townships adopted ordinances parts and put together the ordinance that best fit with our Township. Solar energy is the renewable energy source for the future to cut back on fossil fuel energy. People are asking for it. Mandates are in place for the State utility companies to put these in by certain time spans. We did not consult with Invenergy. It was a coincidence that they began securing leases in the Township and they noticed on the website that we were amending the solar ordinance and had questions on a couple sentences in the solar farm section. They began to come to the meetings. They suggested language to clarify those questions and we adopted some of those suggestions.

3. Did the PC OR the Board take the initiative to obtain **Unbias Impact Studies**

regarding ANY of the following? An impact study can be done on an actual application and site plan depending on the proposed use and the proposed lands and a determination if one should be done. It would be difficult and extremely expensive to do a study on the entire Township to add an ordinance for a specific use. We also have a wind energy ordinance.

**Health Risks** An impact study can be done on an actual application and site plan. None of the Township personnel have ever heard of any health risk issues with solar panels. They are widely used for many homes, farms and commercial

systems all over the US.

**Land Value reduction** Rarely do land values go down, especially for something quiet and low to the ground. An impact study can be done on an actual application and site plan. I was involved on a study of land values for a gravel pit application. Studies showed land values do not go down but continue to increase.

**Visual Impacts** Part of the review of an actual application and site plan will include visibility. Some do not like the look of them and others don't care either way. Our ordinance requires fencing of the units of 6 feet high around them. The Planning Commission can also require landscaping or other various types to screen the panels from homes or street views.

**Environmental Impacts** (from experiences sources) Again, this would be looked at when/if we get an actual application and site plan according to the ordinances.

**Wildlife** – specifically the impact on Deer and the Eagles that are just now growing in the area This would be looked at if we get an actual application and site plan. To high of fencing can prevent deer movement. Small holes in the bottoms can allow rabbits or other small animals to move back and forth. We would have to look at why these would affect eagles as they fly and have excellent eyesight.

**Local Infrastructure** (during installment stages and decommissioning) Not sure what you are asking. The company will hire people to install the post mechanisms to hold the panels and similar people would remove them if they are no longer used. I believe a machine drives the posts into the ground and the panels are bolted to the cross structures.

**Farmland Preservation** This can be reviewed on an actual application and site plan. It is up to the landowners on whether they want to preserve their farm land or sell it or lease it for this purpose or other purposes. The Township is interested in keeping farm land if possible.

4. If yes, were these reports a consideration for the Board prior to voting or is Invenergy's information and guidance all that was considered. They have made sure they are (and have been) present at the meetings for guidance, but I do not see where an independent source was retained on these issue. Specifically one that would offer an alternate view. The above reports or studies are typically done on an actual application and site plan. Ordinances are written to meet laws and allowed as a permitted use or a special use in specific areas of a Township to be located in. Invenergy attended meetings and mostly listened except for questions on a couple areas of the solar farm section. They suggested the clarifications to those couple areas which the Planning Commission took under advisement. It is not uncommon for a future applicant to attend meetings to observe process and procedures or to offer suggestions. They were not leading or guiding the Planning

Commission. No application or site plan has been received.

5. Did the Township retain legal Council from a **Municipal Attorney** regarding Solar Farms and best practices that are in the interests of all of the residents of Keene Township? Specifically, for the guidance of drafting the portions of the Ordinance regarding Commercial Solar Farms? If Yes, what Lawfirm? No, we used other township's already adopted ordinances and tweaked them to fit our Township. Most already adopted ordinances are written by professional planners and sometimes they have attorney review before adoption.

6. (Zoning Enabling Act) Did the PC submit the text amendments to the county or regional planning commissions for advisory review (of comment)? The Township may have final authority, but wondering if this was done to show additional due diligence in the best interests of the Community? No, the County no longer has a planning commission and they have waived their rights to review township ordinances. They do not meet anymore and may be dissolved.

7. Keene Township has approximately 23000 Acres. Is there a cap or percentage amount as to how much of the available acreage can be used or is it unlimited? It is not capped by a number of acres. Home or ag farm solar systems are allowed in all districts. Commercial solar farms are allowed in the AG and AR districts on 5 or more acres and in the RR district on at least 40 acres. Those districts and acreage minimums keep them in the more open areas of the Township. Solar commercial farms must be near high voltage lines or a substation so that also limits where they can be placed and the size of them.

Answers were supplied by the Zoning Administrator, Jeanne Vandersloot