

# HIGHBANKS SOLAR

COMMUNITY OUTREACH PLAN

August 2024

## CONTENTS

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>3</b>
1.1	Purpose.....	3
1.2	Company background.....	3
1.3	Project description .....	3
1.3.1	Project components .....	3
1.4	Project vicinity.....	4
<b>2</b>	<b>Community outreach plan</b> .....	<b>5</b>
2.1	Community Outreach to Date .....	5
2.2	Future Community Outreach Plan Activities.....	6
2.2.1	Community open houses .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
2.2.2	Construction notification .....	7
2.2.3	Agency consultations.....	7
<b>3</b>	<b>Community Concerns</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Conclusion</b> .....	<b>9</b>

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Purpose

Public participation and community engagement is an important component of any successful energy project's development. It is Oriden's practice to engage the public and stakeholders in its projects as soon as possible after obtaining site control and making the decision to proceed with development of a project site. The purpose of this Community Outreach Plan ("COP") is to fulfill Oriden's internal standard for community engagement practices as well as the provisions for a community outreach plan in New York State Energy Research and Development Authority's (NYSERDA) 2022 Request for Proposals for Renewable Energy Certificates.

### 1.2 Company background

Highbanks Solar and its parent company, VC Renewables, are renewable energy developers based in New Jersey with an extensive track record of solar project experience in New York. We purchased this project from the original developer, Oriden, and have retained their services to aid us in advancing this exciting project through the permitting process.

With over 2 gigawatts ("GW") of project experience, the team at VC Renewables believes that the future of power generation will be distributed, renewable, and intelligent. The company is a full service renewable energy project developer with the talent and experience to bring projects from concept through operation — including development and permitting, construction, financing, ownership, and asset management.

### 1.3 Project description

The Highbanks Solar Project ("Highbanks Solar" or the "Project") is an up to 12.5 megawatt ("MW") alternating current ("AC") ground mount, solar photovoltaic (PV) generating Project proposed in the Town of Leicester ("Town") on privately owned property. The Project was sited to take advantage of 1) on-site interconnection, 2) flat topography, 3) large parcel acreage, 4) easy ingress/egress, and 5) very low residential density on surrounding parcels

The Project site is bounded by Oaks Road to the west, Highbanks Road to the south and a NYSEG 115 kV electric line to the north. The Project's proposed point of interconnection is NYSEG's Highbanks substation via 34.5 kV bus, which is located immediate east of the Project. The Project is anticipated to utilize approximately 125 acres for the PV solar array and associated Project components.

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#### 1.3.1 PROJECT COMPONENTS

The proposed Project is planned to consist of the following built components:

- PV solar panel array that will produce direct current (DC) electricity mounted on either fixed tilt racking or single-axis tracking mounts that will most likely be on driven piles into the ground. The PV solar panels will be similar to those that have been installed throughout the country on homes and in the ground.
- Inverters placed throughout the PV array to convert DC electricity to AC electricity
- Access roads within the PV array and accessing the Project from a public road

- Fencing around the PV array
- Temporary laydown yard for construction equipment
- Medium voltage collection line system that will collect AC power output from inverters and deliver to substation
- A project substation that will collect the Project's electric output and transform it up to the appropriate voltage (34.5 kV)
- Other electric equipment to be specified by NYSEG in order to allow the power generated by the Project to be injected into the 34.5 kV Highbanks substation

#### 1.4 Project vicinity

The Project is located in a rural agricultural area of Livingston County that is characterized by a mix of agricultural, small woodlots and rural residences (Figure 1). The closest town to the proposed Project is Mount Morris, which is located over four miles to the west of the Project. The Project is also located approximately one mile north of Letchworth State Park, which provides for good opportunities for public education and outreach during the Project's operation.

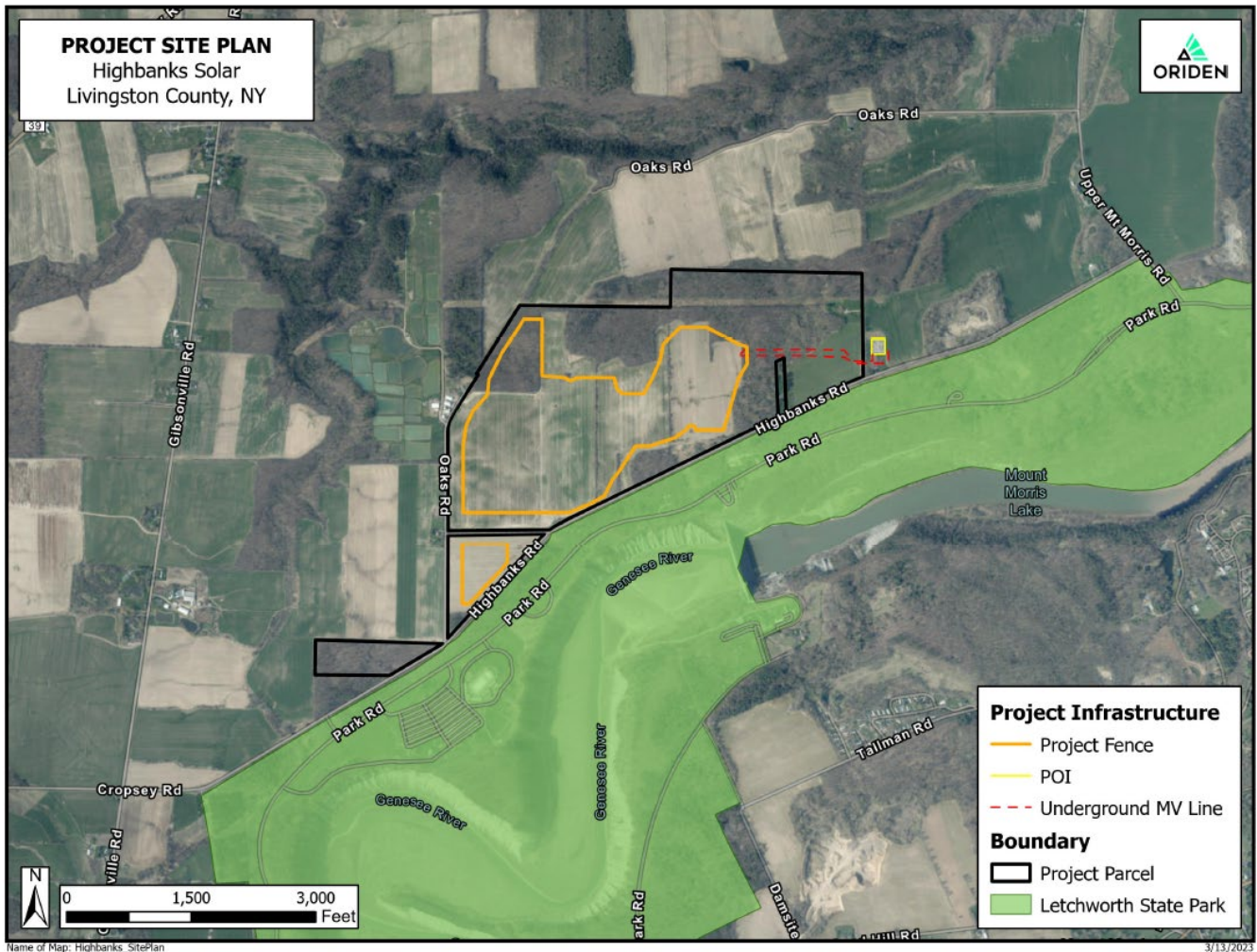


Figure 1 – Project vicinity map

## 2 COMMUNITY OUTREACH PLAN

### 2.1 Authority Having Jurisdiction and other Stakeholders

The Town of Leicester is the authority having jurisdiction (AHJ) for the Project. The taxing school district is Mount Morris Central School District. Town local elected officials, contact information and tenure are listed below.

Town Board - 585-382-3231

- Dave Fanaro, Supervisor, 585-202-6784, [Supervisor@townofleicester.org](mailto:Supervisor@townofleicester.org)
- Karen Roffe
- Jason Yasso
- Matt Durbin
- Gerald Hull

Planning Board - 585-382-3231

- Renee Fanaro, Deputy Chair, term to 12/2023
- Tony Gullo, term to 12/2025
- Kathleen DeGraff, term to 12/2025
- Rich Neumann, term to 12/2022
- Paula Smith, Chair, term to 12/2024

Zoning Board of Appeals – 585-382-3231

- Don Kane, Chair, term to 12/2024
- Clara Scaccia, term to 12/2025
- Michael Parsons, term to 12/2024
- George McCausland, term to 12/2023

Town Code Enforcement Officer: Sean Sullivan – 585-382-3231, [codeofficer@townofleicester.org](mailto:codeofficer@townofleicester.org)

## 2.2 Community Outreach to Date

Oriden has had extensive outreach and communication with the Town to date. Starting in May 2018 Oriden has had monthly communication with the Town Code Enforcement Officer Shawn Grasby as well as frequent communication with the Town Supervisor, Dave Fanaro. Oriden held a community open house on Wednesday November 13<sup>th</sup> at the Cuylerville Fire Hall. Approximately 25 people attended the open house and no one spoke in opposition to the Project. Oriden also has attended Town Board meetings prior to special use permit application, which culminated in a special use permit application and site plan being submitted on June 19, 2020. Following the permit application submission Oriden attended monthly Planning Board meetings. Oriden also attended virtually the Livingston County Planning Board meeting for their review of the permit application. The public statement hearing for the permit application was held on August 24<sup>th</sup> and the SEQR public hearing and determination is occurred on September 19<sup>th</sup> 2020. Ultimately, the Town issued the Project a Special Use Permit (SUP) in December 2020. Because SUPs are only good for one (1) year, Oriden has twice extended the SUP; most recently in November 2022.

On August 24, 2020, Oriden met with Bill Bacon of the Livingston County Industrial Development Agency (IDA) to discuss tax treatment for the Project in the form of a Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) through the IDA. Bill stated the IDA and their Board is supportive of renewable energy projects and have a straightforward application and process for solar project PILOTs. Bill stated it is an approximately 2-3 month process to complete IDA approval of a PILOT application assuming a complete application is provided to the IDA. Due to interconnection delays, Oriden has not yet applied for a PILOT but did have an updated meeting with Bill in Fall 2022 to confirm no major changes to the PILOT process had occurred since the previous August 2020 meeting.

In terms of adjacent landowners, there are only two landowner residences that have visibility to the Project. The Project has met with both adjacent landowners and, based on their concerns and feedback, has added vegetative screening and proposed more aesthetically pleasing vegetative screening at the Project. One of the landowners that runs a bait farm business and appreciates that the Project will not use any chemicals and will preserve the existing site's hydrology and not increase erosion or sediment leaving the site.

## 2.3 Future Community Outreach Plan Activities

Following the expected approval of the special use permit application, Highbanks Solar plans to submit a building permit application to the Town and will attend meetings in support of that application if necessary. Similarly, Highbanks Solar plans to engage the Town on a host community agreement and road use agreement as required in the Town solar law following expected approval of the Project's special use permit. Highbanks Solar will also offer to attend other Town meetings as requested by the Town. These and the below efforts will allow Highbanks Solar to engage with stakeholders and will offer multiple avenues of information distribution so that stakeholders and the public have varied opportunities to obtain information and comment on the Project.

Highbanks Solar has provided the Town with website links to the permit application materials and that information is posted on the Town website to ensure the public can view the proposed Project information at any time.

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### 2.3.1 CONSTRUCTION NOTIFICATION

Prior to construction Highbanks Solar will mail a notification of commencement of construction to Town stakeholders and adjacent landowners to the project parcels. The notification will include an anticipated construction commencement date as well as contact information of a Highbanks Solar representative as well as an onsite construction company representative should stakeholders have any comments or complaints during the construction of the Project.

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### 2.3.2 AGENCY CONSULTATIONS

Oriden has performed consultation with the below agencies as following:

- New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
  - Consultation letter sent through Natural Heritage Program and response received on May 4, 2020. Based on third party environmental consultant review of the letter, the two plant species listed in the letter could be present based on forested habitat onsite. It was determined no suitable habitat was present onsite for the other species listed in the letter. The Project commissioned a rare plant survey of the Project site by a qualified botanist and no rare plants were found during the survey.
- New York State Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) – Division of Historic Preservation
  - Submitted online consultation through the Cultural Resource Information System. OPRHP provided a response letter on October 21, 2019 recommending a Phase I archaeological survey. The Project commissioned a Phase I archaeological survey and the fieldwork is complete. The Project facilities are able to avoid any sensitive archaeological resources onsite based on the fieldwork conducted. The final report has been submitted to OPRHP and comments from the OPRHP on it are pending.
- New York State Department of Agriculture & Markets (NYSDAM)
  - Communicated with NYSDAM representatives, Andrew Steiner and Kate Tylutki, in August 2020 regarding proposed project and did not receive any Project specific responses. Further, no comments from NYSDAM were received during SEQRA coordinated review.

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### 2.3.3 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT DURING OPERATIONS

Highbanks Solar will hold annual training with the fire department and emergency service departments to ensure they are fully trained and aware of the proper procedures and access points to the Project should there be an emergency onsite. Concurrent with this training, Oriden will invite adjacent landowners and local stakeholders to meet at the Project site to discuss any concerns or issues with the operation of the Project. Highbanks Solar will mail the adjacent landowners and post a notice of the meeting at the Town hall.

### 3 BENEFITS TO DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES

The Village of Mount Morris has a designated opportunity zone (#36051030900) that is located approximately 1 mile east of the project site. This opportunity zone designation type is low-income community. Highbanks Solar believes the Project can provide multiple direct, meaningful and assured benefits to the Village of Mount Morris opportunity zone, which should advance the goals of the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act. Oriden's plan to benefit this disadvantaged community consists of four components:

1. **Require purchase of good and services in the opportunity zone**

The Village of Mount Morris is the closest area of business to the project site it is the logical location for construction and operation workers to shop, eat, obtain gas and small tools and potentially obtain housing within. Oriden will include a provision within its contract with the Engineering, Procurement and Construction contractor that the Village of Mount Morris should be given priority for the above goods and service needs. This will serve to benefit multiple businesses within the opportunity zone.

2. **Provide lighting to increase use for trail system that runs through opportunity zone**

The Genesee Valley Greenway is a local trail system that has been under development for over 30 years. It is the premier trail system in the region, and it passes directly through the opportunity zone. Currently, there is no lighting along the Greenway that is within the opportunity zone. The addition of lighting would provide safer use conditions that would serve to increase the Greenway's use during evening hours. This would provide a direct benefit to businesses located within the opportunity zone since Greenway users would be more likely to visit the businesses due to the lighting allowing longer hours of use of the Greenway. The Project has already met with Friends of the Genesee Valley Greenway along with Town representatives in July 2020 to discuss the best locations and quantity of lighting for the greenway that the Project could sponsor.

3. **Sponsored project in opportunity zone**

Oriden will commit to supporting an annual community project or volunteer event either through a donation, sponsorship or providing volunteers for the specific event. Oriden will work with opportunity zone business leaders and the Village of Mount Morris to determine the annual event to support and will make an annual financial commitment.

4. **Support for Project Landowner's business**

The Project has the ability to directly support the opportunity zone in a unique manner. The Project's landowner owns Highbanks, a restaurant located within the opportunity zone and within the Village of Mount Morris' main shopping district. Thus, the development payments made by Oriden to the landowner have directly supported him in terms of keeping the restaurant open particularly in this historically difficult climate for restaurants, and operational payments will ensure he has strong financial footing to keep the restaurant going.

### 4 COMMUNITY CONCERNS AND FEEDBACK

Highbanks Solar is not aware of any community opposition to the Project or general opposition to solar development in the community. The Project has held a community open house and attended numerous Town

meetings including a public statement hearing that was publicly noticed for the Project's special use permit application and no one spoke in general opposition to the Project at any of these meetings, however a couple of residents located adjacent to the Project voiced concerns about their viewshed impacts.

As discussed above, Oriden met personally with the adjacent residents whose viewshed is affected by the Project's construction and operation. Based on that meeting Oriden increased the proposed vegetative screening as part of its site plan submission for the Town special use permit and committed to a more aesthetically pleasing tree and shrub species planting of multiple species instead of only evergreens. Another concern raised was if any herbicides or chemicals would be used at the Project, and Oriden has committed to using no herbicides or chemicals during Project construction or operation.

Highbanks Solar will continue conversations with these adjacent residents to solicit further feedback. Any significant updates based on stakeholder feedback or any other reason to its site plan and permit application materials will be posted to the Town's website, so they are publicly available.

## 5 CONCLUSION

Highbanks Solar has the opportunity to be part of New York's clean energy vision through award of a contract with NYSERDA. This Community Outreach Plan is an essential component of the Highbanks Solar's development process and success in achieving this objective. Oriden is excited by the opportunity to develop this Project in coordination with the various stakeholders discussed in the COP and looks forward to continuing to engage the local community as it implements the COP.