

NYSERDA RFP No. RESRFP24-1 Community Engagement Plan

*Submitted by:
Watkins Glen Solar Energy Center, LLC*

Watkins Glen Solar Energy Center, LLC is pleased to submit its Community Engagement Plan consistent with Section 4.3.8 of the RESRFP24-1. Proposers must provide a complete Community Outreach Plan associated with the Bid Facility, and if applicable, Energy Storage, as described below.

1) Identify the Authority Having Jurisdiction (AHJ) and taxing School District, including local elected officials' names, contact information and tenure.

The Watkins Glen Solar Energy Center is proposed in the Town of Dix in Schuyler County and is located within the Watkins Glen Central School District. Town supervisor contact information is provided below:

- Town of Dix Supervisor: Dominick Smith
 - Contact:
 - Address: 2021 State Route 414, Watkins Glen, NY 14891
 - Email: dsmith@townofdix.com
 - Phone: 607-857-3471
 - Tenure: Elected November 2021

2) Detail outreach strategies and activities the Proposer has implemented to date and will use to engage stakeholders and interested parties, including affected agencies, and to encourage public involvement throughout the pre-award, development, construction, and operation phases (consistent with the Project Milestone Schedule), including methods of communication and specific channels the Proposer intends to use to disseminate Bid Facility information.

Watkins Glen Solar Energy Center conducted extensive stakeholder outreach and community engagement initially through the Article 10 and eventually through the State Siting Permit review process (following transfer of the application from the New York State Siting Board to the Office of Renewable Energy Siting [ORES]) that culminated in the issuance of a Siting Permit from ORES. A Public Involvement Program (PIP) Plan was developed during the project's pre-application phase in September 2017. The overall objective of the PIP Plan is to engage with all stakeholders in order to understand their varied interests and concerns as they relate to the project, to seek their input and to gather specific, objective information that was utilized to inform the detailed study plans, and to explain methods Watkins Glen Solar Energy Center uses to keep stakeholders informed throughout the entire State renewable energy facility siting review process. The full PIP Plan can be found on the [Watkins Glen Solar Energy DMM](#) page (Final PIP posted on 11/27/2017).

Elements of the Watkins Glen Solar Energy Center PIP Plan implemented to date are summarized in the following sections. These elements outline Watkins Glen Solar Energy Center's approach to engaging with stakeholders from the start (pre-application phase) of the project.

Watkins Glen Solar Energy Center Public Involvement Program Elements

In order to encourage public involvement in the project throughout the State renewable energy facility siting review process, information such as fact sheets, town board meeting and open house presentations, and educational materials were made available on the Watkins Glen Solar Energy Center website (<http://www.watkinsglensolarenergycenter.com>). Information related to language access, identification of environmental justice areas, intervenor funding, a project toll-free telephone number (800-405-9723), and the use of document repositories for paper copies of major project documents are outlined in the PIP Plan.

The goals of the PIP Plan were to:

- Identify groups and individuals with a potential interest in the project, i.e., "stakeholders;"
- Implement activities to make stakeholders aware of the project;
- Facilitate stakeholders' access to information on the project and the State renewable energy facility siting review process in a relatively convenient manner;
- Engage stakeholders to understand their interests related to the project and seek input as to how to best address their interests and concerns as the project moves forward; and,
- Gather specific information from stakeholders that can be used to design objective and useful studies for the project.

Watkins Glen Solar Energy Center completed consultations set forth in the PIP Plan and has held multiple stakeholder meetings. Throughout the process, Watkins Glen Solar Energy Center has encouraged community involvement through open dialog discussions and attendance at meetings with various groups and individuals including adjacent landowners, Town of Dix Town Board, the Schuyler County Industrial Development Agency, the Town of Dix Supervisor, local interest groups, and others as detailed in Watkins Glen Solar Energy Center's PIP Meeting Log (also available on the Document Matter Management [DMM], last uploaded 01/08/2021).

The purpose of the PIP Meeting Log was to document outreach efforts with information such as date, location, attendees (or category thereof), a summary of topics discussed, and any follow-up steps. Watkins Glen Solar Energy Center updated the log quarterly, posted it on the project website, and filed it with the Siting Board Secretary. The PIP Meeting Log also detailed public and agency correspondence or outreach conducted through the project website and by phone. Documented correspondence with Watkins Glen Solar Energy Center, as well as relevant questions and concerns related to the project, were captured in the Meeting Log.

Public Notices

Notices of regulatory filings, such as the Article 10 Application submittal, were served in accordance with the Article 10 regulations and to a project mailing list consisting of the project stakeholders and their points of contact, including host and adjacent landowners, and additional addresses received through public outreach. Watkins Glen Solar Energy Center publishes all required notices in local newspapers, The Watkins Glen Review & Express and the Schuyler County Hi-Lites. The notices are not placed in the “legal notice” section of the newspapers but rather a prominent location in the newspaper. Watkins Glen Solar Energy Center notified the entire stakeholder list, as well as residents within two miles of the project individually by mailing an informational flyer announcing an open house and providing general project information to all unique addresses in the tax assessment rolls.

Open House Information

The PIP Plan had indicated that Watkins Glen Solar Energy Center would hold open house style public meetings prior to and following the Preliminary Scoping Statement filing at a location that will strive to maximize coverage for the largest number of residents, likely to be held at two different times on the same day to help to offer the best opportunities for interested persons to attend.

Details regarding the two open houses held on July 23, 2019 are as follows:

- The open houses were conducted from 11 am to 1 pm and 5 pm to 7 pm.
- Informational flyers were mailed to the entire stakeholder list as well as all landowners within the 2-mile Study Area on July 9, 2019.
- Notification was published in both the Watkins Glen Review & Express and the Schuyler County Hi-Lites approximately 4 weeks prior to the open houses.

Similarly, notification for the third and fourth open houses, similarly held in the afternoon and evening of March 12, 2020, was published in Watkins Glen Review & Express and the Schuyler County Hi-Lites. Informational flyers were again mailed to the entire stakeholder list as well as all landowners within the 2-mile Study Area in February 2020, approximately 3 weeks prior to the open house.

Following both sets of open houses, comments on potential visual impacts, potential wildlife and wetland impacts, array location, and compatibility with existing community character were received. The following actions regarding these comments were performed by Watkins Glen Solar Energy Center:

- Proposed vegetative screening to address concerns about views from residential receptors;
- Conducted extensive wildlife studies and minimized impacts to wetlands;
- Assessment of siting array locations within the project area;
- Proposed a Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) program to deliver economic benefits to the Town of Dix, the local schools, and Schuyler County; and

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- Created a decommissioning plan including detailed information on the decommissioning process.

Consultation with Affected Agencies and other Stakeholders

Each stakeholder consultation meeting was attended by the appropriate project representative and included an overview of the proposed project and the State renewable energy facility siting review process. Additional topics covered during stakeholder consultations varied depending on the stakeholder's role and potential impact. Examples of topics included availability of funding for municipal and local parties, local laws, emergency response requirements, and potential environmental impacts. Stakeholder consultation meetings were documented and summarized in the PIP Plan Meeting Log. As appropriate, Watkins Glen Solar Energy Center conducted subsequent meetings to answer specific questions, and to discuss studies, mitigation, or other strategies that addressed stakeholder concerns. A key to these interactions, and a core of the PIP Plan, was receiving information from the stakeholders.

Document Repositories

While all information pertaining to the project was updated via the project website as appropriate, Watkins Glen Solar Energy Center also provided hard copies of the PIP Plan, the Preliminary Scoping Statement, the Article 10 Application, mailings, and announcements at the following locations for those stakeholders who may not have access to the website, or prefer to review hard copies:

- Town of Dix Town Hall, 2266 County Road 17, Watkins Glen, NY 14891
- Watkins Glen Public Library 610 S. Decatur St., Watkins Glen, NY 14891

Planned Public Engagement Activities Through Construction and Commercial Operation

Watkins Glen Solar Energy Center will continue outreach activities with state, county, and town officials during construction. This outreach will include updates and discussions with the Town of Dix Supervisor to keep town officials and residents updated on the status of the project. Watkins Glen Solar Energy Center will also continue to meet with interested parties, if requested, and will continue to engage stakeholders, sponsor open communication with non-public entities, and continue meeting with community members during preparation for construction, construction itself, and operation.

At least 14 days prior to commencement of construction, Watkins Glen Solar Energy Center will provide notice to host and adjacent landowners within 2,500 feet of any parcels proposed for development and publish the notice in local newspapers. Notice will also be provided to the Town of Dix, Schuyler County officials, and local emergency personnel. This notice will provide important construction-related information including, but not limited to, a map of the project, construction schedule, transportation routes, contact information for the project development manager and construction manager; a description of how to obtain additional information about the project; and contact information and procedure for registering a complaint.

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Pre-construction activities will also include a pre-construction meeting with State agencies and the Town Supervisor and Highway Superintendent. The purpose of the meeting will be to inform the State and local officials of the pending construction activities and to establish open lines of communication.

In addition to the ongoing community engagement actions described above, Watkins Glen Solar Energy Center has developed a Complaint Management Plan to facilitate outreach during construction and operation of the project. This plan outlines specific directions for members of the public to file any complaints and will establish a process for resolution of these complaints in a timely manner.

3) Applicability of the CLCPA goals regarding benefits to Disadvantaged Communities that would be realized with the development and construction of the Bid Facility

The Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (Climate Act) requires that 35-40% of the benefits from the State's investments must be directed to disadvantaged communities (DACs) and State agencies need to consider impacts on DACs in decision making. The New York State Climate Justice Working Group (CJWG) was charged with developing criteria to identify DACs. In March of 2023, the CJWG's final criteria defining DACs were adopted, resulting in 35% of New York State meeting the definition of DAC. In addition to identifying DACs, the CJWG is responsible for ensuring that these communities directly benefit from New York's investment in clean energy.

Watkins Glen Solar Energy Center is not located within a DAC identified by the CJWG. Regardless, the project would result in significant positive economic impacts to the host community through the implementation of a low physical impact development in the form of solar energy generation. As discussed elsewhere in this proposal in greater detail, positive economic impacts in the form of an expected PILOT and Host Community Benefit agreements and a multimillion-dollar construction payroll would provide substantial revenue to the local community and greater Schuyler County area.

As stated earlier, solar energy generation has a low physical impact. Based on the weight of scientific evidence and the design measures to be incorporated into the proposed project design, the project will not have any adverse impact on public health or safety. Commercial-scale solar arrays provide the means to harness renewable solar energy for electricity production that is both clean and renewable. Through the development of solar energy technology, communities can maintain air quality with minimal, temporary emissions produced during construction activities, typical of any commercial construction site. Solar energy technology allows for production of electricity without creating any gaseous, liquid, or solid waste byproducts during operation, and therefore eliminates the need to treat, collect, transport, and dispose of such waste in any significant amount. Indeed, to the extent solar energy is transmitted to the state electric grid, it is predicted to displace the generation of electricity from fossil fuel power plants, thereby reducing emission of air pollutants. This improvement in air quality benefits all the people in the affected airshed. Furthermore, development of solar energy production will help New York progress toward a more sustainable energy future. Solar energy is a dependable source in the energy market that will promote public health through improved air and water quality.

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The project's operation and construction will not result in any significant and adverse disproportionate environmental impacts on affected communities. There will be no air emissions during operation of the facility; any vehicle/equipment emissions during construction and operation will not be significant and adverse and will not disproportionately affect any affected communities; and there will be no significant, adverse traffic, noise, or visual impacts caused by the project. To the contrary, there is the potential for reduced emissions of air pollutants from any fossil fueled power plants that currently affect the community. This will be documented as part of the future permit application.

4) Planned frequency of public events and the anticipated duration, in years, of the public engagement events component of community outreach, and strategies to ensure that public engagement events are widely attended by a representative cross section of host community residents.

Watkins Glen Solar Energy Center plans to conduct public engagement throughout the life of the project, including during remaining permitting activities, construction and operation. Previously completed outreach activities were described previously. Below is a list of some of the planned public engagement events:

- Pre-Construction Phase (present through 2025)
 - Coordination with governing agencies will occur throughout the pre-construction phase, including the ORES compliance filing review process and ultimately into construction and operation of the solar energy center
- Construction Phase (2025 and 2026)
 - Notifications on commencement of construction
 - Continuation of project website/email and phone number to contact project representatives
 - Public Complaint Resolution Plan during construction activities; the plan was submitted to the Public Service Commission for review and was approved as a compliance filing
 - Coordination with community members as requested to address any construction-related concerns
- Operation Phase (2026 through life of project)
 - Notifications on commencement of operation
 - Public Complaint Management Plan during operation activities throughout life of project

5) Details of the direct benefits to the community the Proposer will advance, which may include a local ownership stake in the facility, reduced energy bills for those with homes or businesses in the Bid Facility's vicinity, and/or other direct benefits.

Throughout outreach efforts, Watkins Glen Solar Energy Center has provided details of the direct benefits to the community as a result of the project. These benefits include: the project's ability to

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provide millions in revenue to the county, town and school district to reduce the local tax burden or invest in infrastructure, additional services and resources for residents through an expected PILOT Agreement; and the creation of numerous construction jobs; the generation of safe, clean renewable energy while reducing carbon dioxide emissions and using no water to generate electricity.

Additionally, the project expects to participate in a Host Community Agreement (HCA) under the regulatory framework described in *Case 20-E-0249 - In the Matter of a Renewable Energy Facility Host Community Benefit Program*. Solar developers would be required to pay an annual fee of \$500/MW of nameplate capacity to the utility serving the affected municipalities. Utilities would then apply a bill credit to eligible customers' accounts.

6) Details on past/planned engagement regarding payments in lieu of taxes (PILOT) agreements or host community agreements (HCAs).

Watkins Glen Solar Energy Center will be commencing discussions with the appropriate parties concerning the structure and level of a Payment in Lieu of Tax Agreement (PILOT) and/or Host Community Agreement.

7) Describe local interests and concerns, including identifying plans to thoughtfully build support for and respectfully responding to any opposition to the Bid Facility.

Public outreach conducted to date has resulted in positive reactions welcoming the project and its potential for significant community benefits to the area. No major opposition of the project has been identified by Watkins Glen Solar Energy Center. Community members have raised questions about the project's potential impact on viewshed and the potential for visual screening, potential impacts on natural resources, and project decommissioning. In response, Watkins Glen conducted in-depth studies and assessment of potential impacts of the project, minimized impacts to natural resources, developed a visual screening plan, and conducted outreach describing the benefits of the project. Watkins Glen Solar Energy Center's Article 10 application included detailed studies including, but not limited to, a visual impact assessment, a proposed visual screening plan, a site restoration and decommission plan, and Watkins Glen Solar Energy Center's proposed setbacks.

At NextEra Energy Resources, we believe in building strong partnerships and supporting the communities we serve. At every stage of developing a renewable project, from permitting to construction to operations, we strive to: (i) establish a cooperative relationship with the community; (ii) listen to our neighbors and share information; and (iii) ensure that the project proposal fits the interests and priorities of the community.

8) Identify strategies the Proposer will use to mitigate concerns raised by the public regarding the Bid Facility, and if applicable, Energy Storage. This may include visibility and viewshed Impact mitigation efforts, accommodations to co-locate agricultural activities, or other issues of importance to the host communities.

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The primary strategy used to mitigate concerns raised by the public was the siting of the array itself. This included the use of appropriate design considerations such as setbacks to roads and adjacent landowners, lot coverage that allows for sufficient generating capacity while also maintaining compatibility with the existing community character and siting the facility in areas with less visibility to the public to the greatest extent practical. Watkins Glen Solar Energy Center has incorporated a landscape buffer consisting primarily of native evergreen trees and shrubs to provide an effective visual buffer for adjacent residential receptors.

Additionally, the project will address decommissioning concerns through compliance with the state's rigorous decommissioning requirements. As part of the project's permitting and approval process, in the early phases of its development, the project is required to fully fund decommissioning efforts through a letter of credit or other financial security. These funds will be set aside to fully decommission the project and restore the land to its original condition. Furthermore, Watkins Glen Solar Energy Center plans to abide by New York State Agricultural & Markets (NYSAGM) guidelines for solar installation requiring the land's potential to return to agricultural use after decommissioning.

9) Method for soliciting feedback and input from the public and affected agencies and the process for sharing feedback and responses publicly.

As described previously, Watkins Glen Solar Energy Center has solicited feedback and input from the public and affected agencies through hosting a meeting with community members, meetings with affected agencies and other stakeholders as requested, at local town board meetings, and by providing a project email and telephone number for the public to contact project representatives. Watkins Glen Solar Energy Center intends to continue public engagement throughout the life of the project.