

Community Engagement Plan

Current Assessment

Azurent has reached out to a couple of people at the Steuben County Building and Zoning Department, to (1) confirm there are no ordinances or zoning requirements that would disallow the solar project and (2) gain an initial read of township interest in and support of the proposed project. No response was received in time to be included in this document.

However, Azurent has corresponded with several people with the New York Department of Environment and Energy. Their team researched the Zoning for Renewable Energy Database, which shows townships and counties that have considered renewable energy in their zoning ordinances. Lindley and Steuben County are not among those listed that allow renewable friendly zoning for their county and city.

Furthermore, Azurent has been able to confirm through the New York Department of Natural Resources (DNR) that development of utility-scale solar is consistent with local zoning plans and ordinances in Steuben County. Everyone we have discussed this project has been very supportive for our solar project in Steuben County. These factors were key to the DNR decision to support this exploration of solar potential: (1) no conflicts with rare, threatened and endangered species or sensitive ecosystems and (2) consistency with local zoning plans and ordinances. In a public announcement, DNR noted that such large solar development would provide new sources of power for New York and increase local tax bases. The treasurer of Lindley noted that the increased electricity supply could help drive down electricity costs that are unusually high in the area.

At this early stage in project development, Azurent has not yet canvassed the community and developed a firsthand assessment of local community reaction to the proposed project. Azurent cannot at this time provide a list of local references or documented correspondence with community leaders and landowners. However, if NYSERDA decides to move forward with this proposal, Azurent will conduct outreach and present a thorough assessment.

Action Plan to Engage Stakeholders and Garner Public Support

Azurent is committed to a multi-phase process to inform, include and involve stakeholders and communicate project benefits. The objective is increased buy-in, acceptance and support for the project. A preliminary action plan follows. Azurent will coordinate with community and utility leaders to refine this plan.

Step 1: Create a Solar Advisory Committee or Task Force

As a starting point, Azurent would work to create an advisory committee or task force that includes a broad cross-section of the community in order to better understand stakeholder perspectives and increase buy-in.

Potential group members include the following:

- Solar industry representatives, such as installers, developers, local manufacturers, and relevant labor organizations
- Subject matter experts, such as policy analysts, technical experts and advocates
- Members of local nonprofits, environmental groups and other community-based organizations (CBOs), or local members of national organizations
- Residents from various income levels and communities of color
- Utility representatives
- Local government budgetary staff
- Local government planning and sustainability staff
- Local government infrastructure and maintenance staff
- Local city council members, county supervisors and other government officials and decision makers
- Zoning, building and permitting officials
- Homeowners, renters and residential building owners or managers
- Representatives from local businesses, chambers of commerce, financial institutions and workforce development boards
- Representatives from local education and training institutions
- Members of existing working groups, such as those focusing on climate change, building energy efficiency and justice, equity, diversity and inclusion
- Residents who champion solar in the community

Step 2: Coordinate with Key Organizations

In addition to including members of key organizations on solar advisory committees and task forces, coordinating with relevant organizations can increase effectiveness, equity and inclusiveness. Example

organizations to target are provided below.

- State Energy Offices
- Utilities
- Community-Based Organizations focused on renewable energy development (may work with CBOs to host and publicize meetings, co-develop outreach materials)
- IBEW Labor Union for involvement and access to trained and qualified work force
- Higher Education Institutions for expertise through R&D, published documents and public outreach

Step 3: Engage Stakeholders in Public Meetings

Outreach to multiple stakeholder groups is important to build a better understanding local priorities and land-use issues and, in turn, educate the public about solar. Meeting ideas include the following:

- Provide advance notice of engagement opportunities and publicize the timeline for future opportunities.
- Schedule engagement opportunities around work schedules, when more people can attend, and schedule multiple times for critical topics to accommodate different work schedules.
- Offer online and in-person engagement options
- Consult with residents and businesses to identify comfortable and accessible meeting locations, such as the public library
- Enhance accessibility via free parking, free transportation, refreshments, handicap accessibility, etc.
- Host webinars
- Partner with CBOs
- Plan engagement opportunities, such as periods for public comments, that are clear but flexible to accommodate feedback
- Engage communities via individual relationships and by leveraging relationships with trusted community organizations

Beyond in-person and online meetings, the following are other methods for public engagement:

- Informational displays at locations such as libraries, community centers and schools
- Local surveys, emails, newsletters and announcements
- Discussions at community group meeting
- Distribution of surveys, educational materials and public meeting notices at local events
- Focus groups for gathering in-depth views on local perceptions of solar
- Workshops for educating stakeholders, facilitating discussion and increasing buy-in
- Solar fact sheets shared at events, online or both

Step 4: Continue to Communicate Project Benefits

Messaging using a variety of communication tools should emphasize the following project benefits:

- Carbon-free energy production
- Increased property and sales tax revenues
- Local jobs
- Reliable locally produced electricity
- Upgrades to local power grid, greater grid stability
- Benefits of solar plus storage such as smoothing of electricity prices and storage of excess renewable energy that otherwise could not be used
- Site restoration to former condition after decommissioning