



# ELP Rotterdam Solar

PRO 37588

Application # 228-01

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## Community Engagement Plan

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## Purpose

Community engagement is a key component in the successful siting and advancement of renewable energy projects in New York State. Throughout the development process, public participation plays an important role in informing an understanding of local interests and concerns and making recommendations relevant to project design and implementation. This input shapes outcomes and leads to improved projects.

This Community Engagement Plan (“Plan”) is intended to provide general information regarding the proposed project for public review. It demonstrates the types of public outreach efforts to be undertaken to inform community members and key stakeholders about the project, in the interest of supporting an inclusive process. This plan’s content and structure is designed to be consistent with the provisions for community engagement required of all projects participating in the Large-Scale Renewables program administered by the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA).

## Company Background

VC Renewables is a US-based renewable energy company with extensive experience developing distributed- and utility-scale renewable energy projects across North America. VC Renewables’ platform combines the financial capability of Vitol, one of the world’s leading energy companies, with management expertise spanning all phases in the life of a renewable energy project: from permitting and development, to financing and construction, and asset management and ownership.

VC Renewables is committed to being a part of New York’s clean energy transformation and helping the State achieve its goal to source 70% of its electricity from renewable sources by 2030. The establishment of this Clean Energy Standard propelled New York State to the forefront of the nation in the fight to address climate change, reduce harmful air pollution, and ensure a diverse and reliable low-carbon energy supply. The VC Renewables team already operates many renewable energy projects in New York, and with a broad portfolio of additional projects under development in the state, we are deeply invested in the successful advancement of renewable energy in New York State.

## Project Description

ELP Rotterdam Solar (the “Project”) is a 20-megawatt (MWac) solar photovoltaic facility, proposed on privately-owned property in the Towns of Rotterdam and Princetown in Schenectady County, New York.

The project’s location was chosen for (1) its favorable interconnection to the electric transmission grid on-site, (2) its lack of impact to prime agricultural soils (MSG 1-4), (3) its minimal impacts to threatened or endangered species habitat and other sensitive environmental resources; (4) the opportunity for significant natural vegetated buffer between the project and nearby roadways, properties, and public view points; and (5) the presence of sufficient land area to enable optimized design and efficient solar production.

The site is bounded by Crawford Road to the south, and Sanborn and Rynex Corners Road to the north and west. The proposed point of interconnection (POI) is to National Grid’s Rotterdam – Maple Ave 115kV line, which borders the project site to the east.

The project site is situated in a rural agricultural area characterized by a mix of woodland, pasture and rural residences. The project’s array area will be sited primarily on land consisting of formerly abandoned and overgrown pasture. The two properties on which the project will be sited encompass over 500 acres of land collectively; however, only a portion of this land will be required for the solar facility, allowing flexibility to optimize for minimal impact on sensitive resources, and providing an opportunity to preserve the remaining acreage in an undeveloped state.

The proposed project facility will consist of the following components:

- **Solar photovoltaic (PV) panels** – Crystalline silicon PV panels, each approximately 3 feet by 8 feet and grouped into arrays, will produce direct current (DC) electricity.
- **Racking system** – The solar panels will be attached to a single-axis tracker racking system and secured into the ground by posts. The anticipated height of the panels and racking structure will be no more than 15 feet above existing grade at any given point.
- **Central inverters** - Inverters placed throughout the PV array will convert DC power produced by the solar panels in to utility-grade alternating current (AC) power.
- **Access roads** – Roads will be constructed into and within the PV array to allow safe and reliable access for construction, maintenance, and emergency services.
- **Fencing** - A security fence will enclose the PV array per electric code requirements. Agricultural-style fencing will be used (wooden posts with wire mesh).
- **Project substation** – Medium-voltage collection lines that collect the electric output from inverters and deliver it to the substation that will transform the Project's electrical output up to the appropriate utility voltage (115kV) and establish the grid connection to the electric transmission lines that run through the property.

The project has been designed to avoid and minimize potential impacts to the local viewshed, habitats, and other sensitive resources:

- **Viewshed** – The project will be set back from the road and supplemented with vegetative screening as necessary to minimize visual impacts.
- **Threatened or endangered species habitat** – A thorough review of agency records, further supported by on-site habitat and species surveys, confirms that the project will not result in impacts to endangered or threatened species.
- **Wetlands** – State and federal wetlands have been thoroughly delineated on the site and the project has been designed to minimize any impacts to wetlands.
- **Agricultural resources** - The project site is not in an agricultural district and does not include prime agricultural soils, resulting in no effect on productive soil resources or loss of agricultural land and food production.
- **Protected lands** - The project site is not in proximity to or located on protected lands, including forest preserves, wildlife management areas, or parks.

## Authorities Having Jurisdiction

The primary Authority Having Jurisdiction (AHJ) for the Project is the Town of Rotterdam, whose Town Supervisor is Mollie Collins, 1100 Sunrise Blvd, Rotterdam, NY 12306, [mcollins@rotterdamny.org](mailto:mcollins@rotterdamny.org), (518) 355-7575, x393. Ms. Collins was re-elected in November 2023 and her current four-year term goes through the end of 2027. The taxing school district is the Mohonasen Central School District. Town of Rotterdam local elected officials, contact information, and tenure are listed below:

Town Board – 518-355-7575

- Mollie Collins (Town Supervisor) – *term expires 12/31/27*
- Jack Dodson (Deputy Supervisor) – *term expires 12/31/25*
- Joseph Mastroianni (Councilmember) – *term expires 12/31/25*
- Teri Gallucci (Councilmember) – *term expires 12/31/27*
- Ron Schlag (Councilmember) – *term expires 12/31/27*

Planning Commission – 518-355-7575 ext.395

- Kimberly Scannell (Chair)
- Lynn Flansburg (Member)
- Joseph Miglucci (Member)
- Wayne Calder (Member)
- Joseph Signore (Member)

The Town of Rotterdam adopted a solar farms law in February 2017, allowing solar facilities in the agricultural, light industrial, and heavy industrial zoning districts by special use permit and site plan approval. The project submitted an application to the Planning Commission for sketch plan review in August 2021 and followed up with a complete application in August 2022, designed to be consistent with all requirements of the Town's zoning law then in effect. The Town Planning Commission declared lead agency in August 2022.

In December 2022, the Town initiated a 12-month solar moratorium to review its solar law, which was extended in December 2023 for an additional 6 months. Review of the project's application by the Planning Commission has been on hold, pending the completion of the moratorium and passage of an updated solar law.



## Community Engagement

It is important that the public and interested stakeholders have opportunities to obtain information on the facility and participate in the proceedings that will guide its development, and that prospective concerns are incorporated into the project design.

Our outreach approach begins with proactive communication with representatives from the host community. In the early development phase of a project, typically following execution of landowner agreements, the development team contacts local officials to introduce a project concept, and exchange basic facts regarding solar technology, project construction and operation, and the local permitting context. Additional topics covered in introductory project meetings include strategies for environmental impact analysis and mitigation and appropriate channels for dissemination of project information to the public. A key goal of this initial consultation is to identify any fatal flaws or particular sensitivities that should inform our approach to community outreach and project design.

Following execution of site control with the landowners, the development team for ELP Rotterdam Solar met with the Town Supervisor and Town Planner in May 2020 to introduce the project, and discuss the proposed array, its location and key design details. Initial feedback from the meeting was positive and encouraging of the project's submission for Planning Board review under the provisions of the active Solar Law.

The development team subsequently met with the Town Building Inspector and Town Planner to review the permitting plans, which were submitted for the August 2021 Rotterdam Planning Commission Meeting. On August 16, 2021, a sketch plan of the project was presented at the Planning Commission Meeting, where the Commission members provided additional positive feedback on the project's location and design. A full application was submitted to the Planning Commission in August 2022, following further progress on the project interconnection and completion of full site designs. Following the September Planning Commission meeting, the Town Engineer provided comments on the site plans and applications, responses to which were provided at the following Planning Commission meeting in December 2022.

ELP Rotterdam Solar hosted a public information session on the project in September 2022, following the permitting meeting with the Town Planning Commission. The event was well attended and included a representative cross-section of residents from the host community. Discussions at the event highlighted the basics of solar, siting

considerations, and frequently asked questions regarding solar. We also solicited comments and input on the project designs which were available for review at the event. Certain attendees expressed concerns with the project, centering primarily access to the site and areas of potential visual impact. In response to these concerns, the project has subsequently worked with additional resident landowners to secure new land and access and allow greater flexibility for the siting of key project components including the PV arrays and access roads.

Going forward, the project intends to continue to support community engagement activities, through future public permitting meetings in front of the AHJ as well as additional public informational sessions as appropriate, to support continued engagement as the project proposal continues to evolve and be refined.

Outreach Activity	Duration	Frequency
Comments and Inquiries	2 years	Continuous
Host Landowner Outreach	2 years	Continuous
Township Supervisor Meetings	2 years	Continuous
Planning Commission Meetings	1 year	Continuous
Adjacent Landowner Outreach	2 years	Continuous
Project Informational Sessions	1 year	As needed

If the project secures approvals and is put into construction, the onsite construction manager will coordinate closely with the building inspector, neighbors, and other key local stakeholders. If stakeholders have any questions about the project construction, they can reach out to the onsite construction manager, who will then either address their question directly or connect them with the appropriate person on the project team. Once project construction is complete and the project is operational, there will be signs on the project's perimeter fence indicating that the project's contact information.

## Agency Consultations

In addition to working with the host community, ELP Rotterdam Solar has engaged affected agencies and other key stakeholders, as highlighted below:

- **New York State Department of Environmental Conservation**
  - A Natural Heritage Program consultation response was received in March 2021 confirming no records of rare or state-listed animals or plants or significant natural communities at the project site or in the vicinity.
  - A Jurisdictional Inquiry, made in August 2021, led to a response from DEC that confirmed no state-regulated wetlands or streams are mapped in the vicinity of the proposed project, and again no known occurrences of rare or state-listed animals or plants or significant natural communities at the project site or in its immediate vicinity of the project site.
  - A lead agency coordination response was also received from DEC on September 16, 2022 once the Town of Rotterdam initiated SEQR
- **New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation – Division of Historic Preservation (OPRHP)**
  - A consultation was submitted through the Cultural Resource Information System (CRIS). OPRHP reviewed and responded in letters dated August 2021 and March 2023 stating that the proposed project will have No Adverse Impact to historic, cultural, or archeological resources.
- **Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)**
  - In response to an aeronautical study of the proposed project, the FAA issued a determination of No Hazard to Air Navigation in December 2022.
- **New York State Independent Service Operator (NYISO)**
  - The project submitted its interconnection application to NYISO in June 2020 and consistent with NYISO procedures the project has performed level in-depth analyses confirming the feasibility of the project's interconnection and estimating the associated costs.
- **Metroplex**
  - In summer 2021, the project submitted an application to Metroplex, the county economic development organization that administers the Schenectady County IDA, regarding a long-term payment in lieu of taxes (PILOT) agreement, which would provide payments to local taxing jurisdictions. Discussions will resume at conclusion of permitting.



## Community Benefits

In addition to serving as a source of locally produced clean energy, the community benefits associated with solar projects stem from increased economic activity locally through the project development, construction, and operation phases, long-term support for local services by way of property tax or PILOT payments, and economic benefit to local landowners hosting the projects.

VC Renewables intends to utilize local contractors for the project's development, construction, and operation where practical and available. During the project's development phase, the project has worked with local surveying and engineering firms to design the project and prepare permitting materials. This includes boundary and topographic surveys, wetlands delineation, site-civil plans, and other engineering and environmental studies required by the AHJ and other affected agencies. During the project's construction phase, the project aim to will employ local engineering consultants, civil contractors, solar laborers, and electrical contractors to build the facility.

During the project's twenty-year life, the project will seek local contractors to support the facility's operation and maintenance. We will hire a ground maintenance contractor to maintain grass growth below 3 feet within the project fence line, maintain the screening trees, manage tree growth on the property to avoid shading of the panels, plow the driveways in the winter, and care for the gravel driveways. We will also employ solar technicians to perform routine inspections, maintenance, and repairs of the solar energy generating equipment and respond to unexpected interruptions in service.

One of the most tangible and lasting economic impacts to local jurisdictions from a solar power generation facility development are contributions to the tax base. In summer 2021, the Project submitted an application to Metroplex, the county economic development organization that administers the Schenectady County IDA, regarding a long-term payment in lieu of taxes (PILOT) agreement, which would provide payments to local taxing jurisdictions. The project's PILOT will provide direct economic benefit to the Town of Rotterdam, Schenectady County, and the local school district. The ELP Rotterdam Solar project will be a new economic resource to the region, bringing renewed local investment and increased tax base in addition to serving as a significant clean energy source for the region.

An important part of New York State's Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act is a commitment to ensuring the benefits of the state's energy transition flow to Disadvantaged Communities (DACs) as defined by the Climate Justice Working Group (CJWG). The state recognizes that significant economic benefits can be realized by DACs with the development and construction of renewable energy facilities.

This project's location, adjacent to the City of Schenectady, which is a designated DAC, opens up a unique opportunity. The ability to source laborers from a local DAC provides an opportunity for the project to serve as an example of an inclusive transition. VC Renewables is partnering with a neighboring Schenectady organization, called the Social Enterprise and Training (SEAT) Center, which provides education and workforce experiences for disadvantaged youths in the Capital Region. We are working with the SEAT Center, along with The Laborers' International Union of North America (LIUNA), to develop a pilot program in solar construction training. Building off the SEAT Center's existing construction training program, we would provide curriculum materials, transportation support, and monetary contribution to adapt the program to a solar focus. To date, we have held two events to forward our partnership with the SEAT center. In September 2022, we coordinated a tour of the SEAT Center and the Local 157 training facilities. In November 2022, we coordinated a tour of LIUNA's training facility in Glenmont, along with a site visit to one of our community solar projects under construction in the capital district. In April 2023, LIUNA hosted SEAT Center students for a racking training session at their Glenmont facility, which we were able to attend as well. The goal of the program is to train students for the growing renewable energy industry in New York, focusing first on solar projects in the Capital Region.

## Conclusion

Effective Community Engagement reflects an understanding of local interests and concerns, provides high-quality well-timed public education opportunities, demonstrates a commitment to partnering with local officials in proposed host communities, respectfully responds to opposition, and elicits input from the public and affected agencies

This Community Engagement Plan is an important component of ELP Rotterdam Solar's development process and success in achieving this objective. VC Renewables is excited by the opportunity to develop this Project in coordination with the various stakeholders discussed in this plan.