

July 8, 2025

To: Yorktown Town Board

Subject: Lift the Moratorium, Amend the Draft Law, Do Not Ban Solar Farms in Residential zones.

The Yorktown Climate Smart Communities Task Force (CSCTF) is charged with helping Yorktown cut greenhouse-gas emissions, control energy costs, and keep our initiatives aligned with New York’s Climate Leadership & Community Protection Act, which requires 70% renewable electricity by 2030. Large scale solar—sited and screened responsibly—is indispensable to hit that target and to give our residents access to Community Solar bill savings.

What We’d Like To See Included In The Draft

- **Tighter setbacks, height limits, fencing, and landscaping requirements.**
- **Provisions to give first rights for subscriptions to Town of Yorktown residents and the Municipality.**
- **Continued assignment to the Planning Board, which has done an excellent job managing solar projects to date.**

Essential Modifications Before Adoption

Modification	Why it matters
Two-step permit: require vegetative screening to be planted, inspected, and released before racking or panels can be installed.	Eliminates the “open field of steel” phase and addresses the chief visual objection.
Reasonable pacing, not prohibition: consider limiting approvals to “n” ground mounted projects per year rather than an outright ban. Either calculated based on benefit to the town, a lottery system, or at Planning Board discretion.	Preserves Planning Board oversight, protects rural character by not allowing rapid development of large scale solar, while keeping the door open to future clean energy needs.
Recycling transparency: add a line that the Town will review the panel-recycling market every five years and may update decommissioning standards accordingly.	US recyclers such as SOLARCYCLE (≈500,000 panels processed in 2024, up to 95% value recovered) and We Recycle Solar now serve NY utilities and developers at commercial scale.

Modification	Why it matters
Resident-First Community Solar: Any large scale project may elect Community Solar participation at the developer's discretion. When a project does register as Community Solar, the developer must reserve all subscription blocks for Yorktown residents and businesses for a minimum of ninety (90) days after project enrollment opens.	Puts the Yorktown residents and taxpayers first. NYSERDA cites typical Community Solar bill savings of 5-10 %. And solar power is not subject to price fluctuations in the fuel marketplace.
Town of Yorktown Municipal Community Solar Require the developer to hold a fixed percentage (say 10% of capacity) to allow the Town to subscribe for Municipal energy needs.	While the Town is entertaining options for rooftop solar, it is not possible to provide all the energy needs without purchasing some electricity. The Town can leverage these solar farms to reduce municipal energy cost and reduce its greenhouse gas emissions.

Why An Outright Ban Would Hurt Yorktown Residents

- **Higher electric bills** – Residents would lose Community Solar discounts which could curtail rising energy costs.
- **Missed climate & grant dollars** – NYSERDA funding programs increasingly favor municipalities that host renewables; a ban signals Yorktown is closing the door.

Our Request To The Board

The moratorium has served its purpose; we've assessed the Board's and Town's concerns and we have provided a set of clear, protective tools. By not banning large scale solar and implementing the above changes we will:

- Keep projects streamlined through the Planning Board while factoring town resident/board concerns
- Cut resident's energy costs
- Meet state climate obligations
- Protect community character

On behalf of the full Climate Smart Communities Task Force, we respectfully urge the Board to enact these modifications promptly and lift the moratorium.

Prepared and submitted by the Yorktown Climate Smart Communities Task Force

Background: The climate continues to warm, and our greenhouse gases continue to increase in the United States. Our need for electricity is increasing and energy costs continue to rise. We know that generating electricity with solar photovoltaic (PV) panels is clean, long-lasting, economical and not subject to fuel price variations.

After producing carbon-free electricity for roughly twenty-five (25) years, at the end of service life (EOSL) we anticipate adequate recycling facilities will be in place. Although not fully scaled up, there are already established systems in place to recycle panels. Companies like SolarCycle and We Recycle Solar specialize in panel recycling, ensuring materials such as glass, aluminum, and silicon are effectively recovered and reused. This process significantly reduces waste and mitigates environmental impact. However, in any way we measure it, the positive climate impact of using solar PV far outweighs EOSL concerns and is far more urgent.

The climate issue is worldwide and the window to reduce emissions is shrinking. According to the IPCC, we have only a few years left to significantly reduce our carbon emissions before we reach the critical “tipping points” after which the rate of increase in carbon dioxide will dramatically increase: a point of no return.

Homeowners in Yorktown are upset with their increasing utility rates. Solar farms that are part of the Community Solar programs built in Yorktown can be approved with the condition they provide local residents the first choice to select Community Solar and save up to 10% on their bills and lock in their rates. This is an opportunity to really make an impact on utility bills.

Some residents are concerned with property values and visual impacts. We believe solar farms can be excellent neighbors if sited thoughtfully, visually shielded, and constructed properly. Setbacks and screening (put in place first during construction and sufficient to provide ample screening) and native plantings/pollinators provide equivalent or comparable environmental support and wind and sun shielding. We also agree there need to be some limits (a balance) between permitting of solar farms and other development. We encourage the Town of Yorktown to assess the remaining undeveloped properties in Town and consider investing in more open space property to be used as nature preserves (land trusts) for posterity.

The Yorktown CSC Team has carefully considered the solar law and recommends the following be enacted quickly.

- 1) The CSCTF is in agreement with the changes initially proposed to Section 300-81.4 Solar power generation systems and facilities related to setbacks and screening. With proper planning and guidelines, the Town Planning Board has done an excellent job up to now of approving solar farm developments in Yorktown under the current law. The additional setback and screening changes will provide further safeguards.
- 2) Only solar farms that will be part of a Community Solar project, and will offer first subscriptions to our town residents will be approved.
- 3) Additionally, the CSCTF recommends that to mitigate the visual impacts even further, the Town should initiate a two-step permitting process. The developer would be required to complete the installation of visual screening (subject to Town inspection) prior to being allowed to commence construction and installation of the solar panels and other equipment at the site.

The CSCTF disagrees with the proposal to outlaw the development of large-scale ground-mounted solar farms on residential property. This would effectively outlaw new solar farms in Yorktown, depriving the rights of property owners to use their land in this way. Not all residential parcels are well suited for housing development; installing ground-mounted solar in some of those carefully selected locations provides a renewable energy source, with little to no demand or impact on Town infrastructure, school enrollment, traffic, light pollution, etc. while providing wildlife corridors and pollinator plantings.

The CSCTF disagrees with the concept of floating zones. We believe it is overly complicated and fraught with complexity. We believe this amended law is the right way to proceed.

While rooftop solar should be strongly encouraged in both residential and commercial zones, and new development should require it, the generating power is insufficient to meet our energy needs without the addition of efficient solar farms, preferably on already cleared land rather than forested sites.