

Why a temporary Moratorium on Large Scale Solar Projects?

Citizens have been expressing concern since the first solar project installation. Many of the concerns have yet to be addressed. Up until now, there was no group focused on researching the impacts of solar in Warren on a broad scale. Further, the number of solar firms interested in siting solar projects in town has increased exponentially and there is no indication that this interest will subside - we currently have 5 solar projects in the queue for permits. This moratorium would allow us to take a "breath" and research outstanding concerns, align the findings with the Master Plan, and write additional bylaws to address concerns and planning/growth goals.

WHO is Addressing the Concerns:

The Solar Advisory Committee (SAC). The SAC has been created to investigate the impacts, both positive and negative - of the current surge in large scale solar farm development in Warren. The State of Massachusetts has set a goal to be a leader in Solar power and has instituted programs to encourage the development of large scale solar fields across Massachusetts. Unfortunately, the possible and very real impacts of solar have not been examined by the State in their push to roll out incentive programs. Many towns across the state have begun to implement and subsequently update their bylaws to protect their townspeople and landowners from the possible health, safety and financial downsides to the unrestrained rollout of large scale solar farms. Some of the issues the Solar Advisory Committee will be investigating:

1. Impacts on land – how it affects the land on which the panels are located, as well as abutters properties
2. Decommissioning – costs, what work should be included, restoring land to original state, financial surety.
3. Disposal of Solar Panels – where will they go? How much does it cost to recycle/disassemble? Is there a plan in place?
4. Materials contained in panels - Hazardous Waste management: what is known, how is it managed. Is there an emergency plan in place to address breakage/accidents?
5. First Responders – their requirements and safety concerns and how to address.
6. Financial benefits to the town and land owners – we collect over \$225K of personal property taxes on 7 solar projects annually and property taxes collected has increased. Is this reasonable? Low? How else can the town benefit?
7. Real estate impacts – do values increase, decrease, remain neutral. How can we preempt future real estate impacts?

ARTICLE _____: To see if the Town will vote to amend the Town of Warren Zoning Bylaw by adding a new Section 12.2.1, "**Temporary Moratorium on the Construction of Large Solar Energy Facilities**", that would provide as follows:

1. Temporary Moratorium on the Construction of Large Solar Energy Facilities

1. Purpose: The Town of Warren recently has been the target of interest for the construction of large-scale solar photovoltaic energy systems. The Town has identified an immediate need to protect the Town and its citizens by updating its long-term zoning regulations to ensure that such uses and development will be consistent with the Town's long-term planning interests and its Master Plan. It is crucial that the Town act now to establish a temporary moratorium on the use of land and the construction of structures related to such large-scale solar photovoltaic energy systems and the issuance of special permits in connection with same. During the moratorium, the Town will undertake a planning process to evaluate the impacts of current and potential Large Solar Energy Facilities on the health, safety and welfare of Town residents and to consider appropriate amendments to its Zoning Bylaw to address said impacts, in accordance with state and federal law.
2. Temporary Moratorium: Notwithstanding any other provision in the Town of Warren Zoning Bylaw to the contrary, no special permit may be issued for the construction of any Large Solar Energy Facility from the effective date (immediately upon Special Town Meeting vote) until May 31, 2019. The purpose of this temporary moratorium is to allow sufficient time to engage in a planning process to address the effects of such structures and uses in the Town, and to enact or amend bylaws in a manner consistent with sound land use planning goals and objectives.
3. This moratorium shall not apply to any special permit for which application was made prior to the effective date of this bylaw.

Or take any action relative thereto.

Open Spaces section 2006 Master Plan, Warren, MA

The master plan pointed out some of Warren's greatest attributes are its rural areas with scenic landscapes, historic sites, and community character. People are attracted to our town for these positive qualities. We live in an area easily accessible to the major cities of Worcester, Springfield, and Hartford, providing many economic and employment opportunities, yet leaving us with a beautiful landscape in which to live away from the city hustle and bustle.

Part of the attractiveness of our town is being able to own a home with some land around it should one desire a more rural, natural life with the surrounding land and wildlife. Such a resource is difficult to find near major population centers. Rivers, ponds and streams are in abundance. Walks along country roads or through verdant forests are good for the body and soul. A drive through back roads are full of scenes to enjoy and contemplate.

Reptiles and amphibians in our area have drastically declined in numbers and variety from former times. They are in great need of identification, protections and accommodation if they are to survive in an increasingly human-altered environment. In 2006, Massachusetts Fisheries and Wildlife identified two endangered species in Warren – the Wood Turtle and the American Bittern. It was noted that every action should be taken to protect these creature's native habitats in Warren.

The Quaboag River and other stream corridors have the potential to accommodate a large number of recreational uses, if access and connectivity can be successfully addressed among neighboring landowners. There are several historical paths criss-crossing the region that have the potential for linking several towns. There is the Old Baypath Indian Trail, about 16 miles in length, eventually linking the towns of Warren, West Brookfield and New Braintree. Similarly the Quaboag River Water Trail, a little over 12 miles in length, and connecting Warren, with West Brookfield, Brookfield and East Brookfield, and the Central Ware River Valley Rail Trail. Imagine if these trails were completed – what a magnificent resource for everyone in Massachusetts to enjoy the beauty of nature.

Privately owned open space may be vulnerable to environmental stresses and impacts from other forms of development that are economically beneficial, but potentially incompatible with valued landscape features. Careful planning and site plan review will help make the goals of economic development and ecological protection more compatible and less competitive for open space and land-based resources.

Town residents may not immediately consider cultural places and activities to be relevant when addressing open space and recreation planning concerns. Yet these other considerations are significant components of any plan that seeks to connect people with the land on which they live, work and play. It is sometimes easy to take for granted the many historical and natural resource features in a town, even if one passes by them every day. It is very difficult – and often times impossible – to mitigate the loss of such unique features after the fact. By the time a town recognizes the risk of loss, they may already have lost their opportunity to save those special resources and landscapes.

From the 2006 Master Plan, Warren, MA