

63

MEGA SUN: Gigantic solar farms proposed for the Rochester region

Steve Orr, Rochester Democrat and Chronicle Published 12:29 p.m. ET Jan. 24, 2019 | Updated 12:59 p.m. ET Jan. 25, 2019

A half-dozen large solar farms, including three behemoths that would cover 1,000 acres or more, are planned for the Rochester-Finger Lakes region.

The behemoths, in Caledonia, Mount Morris and Byron, are far larger than any solar installation that now exists in New York state.

On a sunny afternoon, the three giant farms would be able to turn out more electricity than the venerable Ginna nuclear power plant just northeast of Rochester, and could satisfy the needs of two-thirds of the households in Monroe County.

The biggest of them, the Excelsior Energy Center in the Genesee County town of Byron, would cover 2,000 acres, 10 times the size of the average New York agricultural farm.

What's 2,000 acres? Picture every square foot of East Rochester covered with 12-foot-high solar panels — and the neighboring village of Fairport, too.

► **Support our journalism** (<https://offers.democratandchronicle.com/specialoffer>)

The solar developments, along with several wind-turbine farms, are part of a new clean-energy initiative announced last week by the Cuomo administration.

ADVERTISEMENT

Ad

Do This To Fix Slow Wi-Fi

 wifblastshop.com

The state said it would invest \$1.5 billion in 20 renewable energy projects, seven of which would be in the Finger Lakes region. The full list consists of 16 solar and four wind projects, including one large wind-turbine development in Orleans County.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo, who has pushed renewable energy projects for years, announced a new goal in his State of the State message that he wanted all the electricity consumed in New York to come from carbon-free sources by 2040.

The new projects, if they come to pass, would go a long way toward advancing Cuomo's agenda.

Rural reception for massive arrays unclear



This solar array on the Rochester Institute of Technology campus is one of the largest here today. Proposed new solar farms in the Rochester region would be as much as 150 times larger. (Photo: MAX SCHULTE/@maxrophoto/, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER)

But it's not yet clear how well the proposals will be received in the rural areas where they'd be located. In recent years, there has been push-back by local governments and residents when developers looking to build large solar farms have begun eyeing farmland and open space.

In Byron, Genesee County, where NextEra Energy Resources of Florida wants to build the enormous Excelsior farm, information is sparse and concern plentiful.

"Approximately a good two-thirds of land in Byron is under cultivation in one form or another. There's a lot of people that would be against it in some form or another," Town Supervisor Roger Rouse said Tuesday. "Then there are some people who would say 'clean energy.'"

The Excelsior center would be the largest solar farm in New York, with roughly 1 million solar panels capable of generating up to 280 megawatts of electricity.

Rouse said all he knows about the proposal is what he learned in a call from the Florida company and a brief presentation to the town planning board by the property owner whose land would be leased to the developer.

Rouse said he doesn't know exactly where the solar farm would be built.

"Most people probably won't know about it. We haven't received anything in regards to it," he said. "I've heard about it. That's about the extent of it."

Win win?

Thirty miles southeast of Byron, the outlook is more positive.

"We're 100 percent behind it. Everybody seems really excited about it," said Mount Morris Town Supervisor Charles DiPasquale, referring to the huge Morris Ridge Solar farm that would be built there. "It's going to be a win-win situation for the town in terms of revenue coming in, which we definitely need."

The developer, [EDF Renewables \(https://www.edf-re.com/\)](https://www.edf-re.com/), would pay about \$400,000 a year to the town, the Mount Morris school district and Livingston County, according to [material filed with the state Public Service Commission \(http://documents.dps.ny.gov/public/MatterManagement/CaseMaster.aspx?MatterCaseNo=18-F-0440&submit=Search\)](http://documents.dps.ny.gov/public/MatterManagement/CaseMaster.aspx?MatterCaseNo=18-F-0440&submit=Search).

The company is a U.S. arm of a large French energy company.

Planning for the Mount Morris project, which would be built between Letchworth State Park on west and Sonyea State Forest on the east, is farther along. EDF Renewables first approached local officials in 2017.

DiPasquale said the land is not actively farmed, and he thought no residents would be displaced. The solar panels would be screened by fences and plantings.

Large payouts to towns and owners

The third giant solar development proposed for this region — along the Genesee River in the town of Caledonia, Livingston County — only came to light recently.

"It's very early on," said Caledonia Town Supervisor Daniel Pangrazio. "We were contacted by the company about three months ago. They kind of gave us a 50,000-foot view of what they were thinking."

What they're thinking is big.

Horseshoe Solar (<https://horseshoesolar.com>), which apparently is named for a nearby horseshoe bend in the Genesee, would be a 180-megawatt solar farm with an array of 600,000 panels.

The project, being developed by Illinois-based Invenergy, would cover 2,600 acres to the northwest of the village of Avon.

The company would pay between \$580,000 and \$700,000 annually to local governments and at least \$690,000 in annual lease payments to property owners, according to [documents filed with the state PSC \(http://documents.dps.ny.gov/public/MatterManagement/CaseMaster.aspx?MatterSeq=57857&MNO=18-F-0633\)](http://documents.dps.ny.gov/public/MatterManagement/CaseMaster.aspx?MatterSeq=57857&MNO=18-F-0633).

Pangrazio said the facility site, currently all used for farming, is owned by an out-of-state company.

There's been little public reaction yet, but it may be coming. "It's just my guess, but I think there'll be some concern ... that it's not going to be used for farmland any more," he said.

The town is hiring lawyers and engineers to help them cope with the proposal. A public information meeting is tentatively set for March.

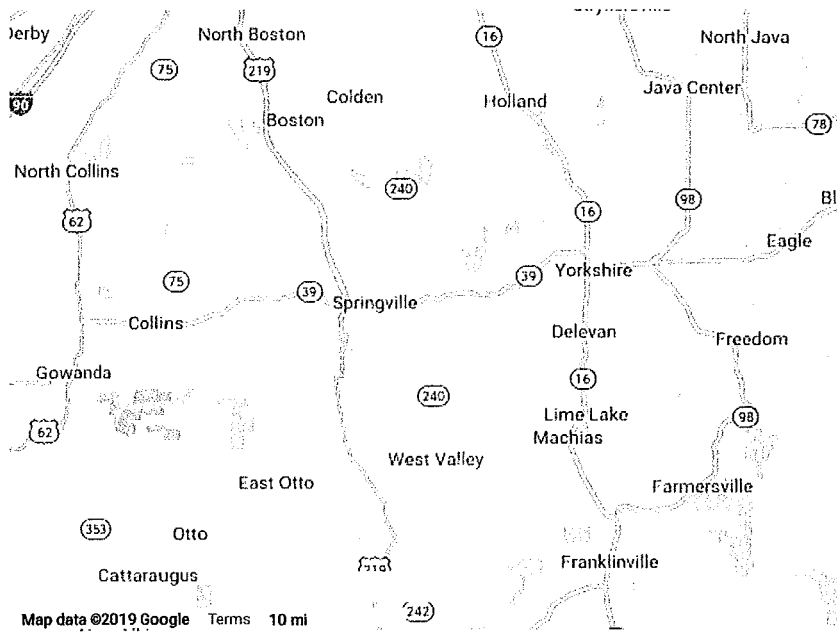


Turbines on a wind farm in Wethersfield, Wyoming County. (Photo: Max Schulte/Staff photographer)

The other projects in the Finger Lakes:

- [Heritage Wind \(http://www.heritagewindpower.com\)](http://www.heritagewindpower.com), a 147-megawatt wind farm in Barre, Orleans County, that has been in the planning stages for several years. The project is being developed by [Apex Clean Energy of Virginia \(/story/news/2016/09/26/another-big-wind-farm-planned-for-orleans-county/91114440/\)](#), which also is seeking to build the Lighthouse Wind project in Orleans and Niagara counties. Both projects face [some community opposition \(https://orleanshub.com/citizens-group-forms-in-barre-to-oppose-wind-turbine-project/\)](https://orleanshub.com/citizens-group-forms-in-barre-to-oppose-wind-turbine-project/).
- Manchester Solar, a 19.99-megawatt facility in the town of Manchester, Ontario County. The project is being developed by Gardner Capital, which has offices in four states.
- North Light Energy Center, an 80-megawatt solar farm in Waterloo, Seneca County. The project is being developed by NextEra Energy Resources.
- Silver Lake Solar, a 24.99-megawatt solar farm in Castile, Wyoming County, that is being developed by Geronimo Energy of Minneapolis.

Huge new solar and wind farms proposed



Obligated to hire local workers

The projects combined will bring \$4 billion in investment, the state said.

The 12 companies that will develop the projects, chosen through what state officials said was a competitive process, have either signed or are negotiating contracts with the state.

Some projects could break ground as soon as August, and all are to be done by 2022, according to Aron Ashrafioun, a spokesman for the state energy development authority.

They will be able to generate enough electricity to satisfy the demands of 550,000 New York state households.

None of the 12 companies is headquartered in New York state, though the provenance of one developer wasn't clear. They are obligated to hire local workers whenever possible, Ashrafioun said.

[See the plans for wind, solar farms in Steuben, Schuyler, Chenango counties](https://www.pressconnects.com/story/news/local/2019/01/23/new-york-renewable-energy-wind-farm-steuben-schuyler-chenango/2644334002/)
[\(https://www.pressconnects.com/story/news/local/2019/01/23/new-york-renewable-energy-wind-farm-steuben-schuyler-chenango/2644334002/\)](https://www.pressconnects.com/story/news/local/2019/01/23/new-york-renewable-energy-wind-farm-steuben-schuyler-chenango/2644334002/)

The projects will generate several thousand construction jobs, though far fewer permanent positions.

Local governments will have planning and zoning control over the projects whose capacity is 25 megawatts or less.

The larger projects will be governed by the state power-plant siting law, known as Article 10. That law gives site approval authority to the state Public Service Commission with input from local governments.

SORR@Gannett.com (mailto:SORR@Gannett.com)

Read or Share this story: <https://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/news/2019/01/24/gigantic-solar-farms-planned-rochester-region/2666009002/>

