A letter from Supervisor Edward M. Michalenko, Ph.D.

Cost-saving Solar Array project on the site of the former town landfill…

After a decade long process of information gathering, discussion, and planning the Town of DeWitt commenced construction of a Solar Array on the site of the former town landfill this summer. Over the 20-year life of the project the town will save more than $2 million on our municipal energy costs. Not only will that save you taxpayer dollars - in terms of removing those expenses from our budget each year - it also represents a carbon reduction of 2,605 metric tons, the equivalent of taking 510 vehicles off the road per year. Further, these numbers could double, as modern solar panels can generate electricity for over 40 years.

As background, in 2007 the town established an Energy Committee to support us to navigate the ever-changing energy market and regulatory environment and to ascertain what energy saving projects would best and most beneficially serve our community. At that time, solar panels were cost prohibitive.

So, why invest in solar now? Believe it or not, solar development expert Hugh Jones put solar panels on the Pentagon in the late 1960's, so this nation has been investing in solar power for almost 50 years. It's only in recent years however, that implementing solar power projects has become affordable; just 10 years ago a solar panel was cost prohibitive. Solar panel costs have fallen 99% since 1977. Today, it's fossil fuel projects that are cost prohibitive; whereas now the infrastructure investment for renewable energy projects – like our solar array project – are affordable. And of course, the sun is free. In fact, all of New York State could be powered if just 30% of our rooftops had solar panels.

Fossil fuel itself begins with solar energy. Sunlight is stored for thousands of years; plants capture sunlight and store that energy via photosynthesis, which forms the basis for our food chain. Decayed and compressed plant materials eventually become fossil fuels: natural gas, oil, and coal. So, why not capture and utilize sunlight – solar energy – at the beginning of the process, rather than at the end of the process via the combustion of fossils fuels that damage natural resources, create toxins, and pollute our environment from extraction through consumption?

In 2016 the Town issued a Request for Proposals for the construction of a Solar Array on the site of the former Town Landfill. We received five proposals and after careful review RER Energy was awarded the $5 million dollar contract; the project is privately financed by RER Energy. When it comes to solar energy projects of this nature, private development is more cost effective than public financing because the private investor is able to obtain tax incentives and depreciation unavailable to the public sector. Plus, the Town has the option to buy the Solar Array after 7 years.

Projections indicate power generated from the panels will allow us to save approximately $70,000 per year over 20 years. The 2.66 Megawatts of annual electricity produced will totally free the Town from

fossil fuels and provide electricity for all of our municipal electric needs; all of our town buildings and facilities, street lights, water and sewer pumps.

Further, utilizing the site of our former town landfill for the Solar Array provides us an exceptional opportunity to not only produce renewable energy on an unusable site, but also to save taxpayer dollars and safeguard the environment.

Our 50-acre former town landfill site continues to be listed as a low level hazardous waste site and is regularly monitored for the NYSDEC. Since the landfill's closure, the Town has intentionally maintained an annual mowing regimen that sustains a grassland habitat. This prevents deep rooted plants from penetrating the landfill cap, thereby preventing surface waters from infiltrating the underlying debris and generating leachate. In addition, this healthy grassland ecosystem harbors a wide variety of flora and fauna species. In fact, several are listed by New York State as Endangered, Threatened or Special Concern. These include the grasshopper sparrow (*Ammodramus savannarum*), Eastern Meadowlark (*Sturnella magna*), and Savannah Sparrow (*Passerculus sandwichensis*) bird species which have been observed nesting at the DeWitt landfill. The Solar Array is perfectly compatible with continued maintenance of the bird habitat.

The Solar Array project, which includes over 7000 solar panels spread out over an 11-acre area, allows us to continue to be respectful and responsible custodians of the environment in and around the former landfill site, provide for our municipal electric needs, and save our taxpayers money. This solar power project makes sense right now, and for the future of our community.

As both a steward of our thriving community and as an environmentalist, I want my grandchildren and great grandchildren to view polluting fossil fuels - natural gas, oil, and coal – like we view using horses as a mode of transportation. The Solar Array project will not only benefit you as a Town of DeWitt taxpayer, but it will also improve the quality of life for your children, grandchildren, great grandchildren and mine.

Most sincerely,
Edward M. Michalenko, Ph.D., DeWitt Supervisor