



Berkeley Heights Environmental Commission

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April 18, 2022

Aida Camacho-Welch
Secretary of the Board
board.secretary@bpu.nj.gov

Re: Docket No. QO21101186 IN THE MATTER OF COMPETITIVE SOLAR INCENTIVE ("CSI") PROGRAM PURSUANT TO P.L. 2021, C.169

The Berkeley Heights Environmental Commission supports the siting of solar projects as part of New Jersey's goal to achieve clean energy by 2050. It also agrees with the finding that forested land acts as a carbon dioxide sink that helps to sequester CO₂ emissions and believes that forested lands that are not Green Acres should also not be considered for solar siting. The act should make clear that the rules apply to private property as well.

The Commission also recommends adding to the definition of forested land: "Forests provide essential environmental services for human health and well-being".

In addition the Commission:

- supports the staff recommendation that all projects participating in the CSI Program, as well as any other grid supply and net metered projects over 5 MW in size, located in New Jersey, be required to meet the siting criteria established pursuant to Section 6 of the Act.
- supports the preference of promoting solar on impervious surfaces and the built environment, and staff recommendation to provide an expedited path to demonstrate that such projects meet the solar siting criteria. It should be clear to solar developers that such locations are desirable sites for projects and benefit from expedited review.
- proposes that the Board make public any requested waivers and provide an opportunity for affected and interested parties to comment on waivers requested before the Board acts upon them. The 'public interest' can't be determined without a provision for input from the public. Furthermore, a more detailed definition of 'public interest' should be developed.
- recommends mitigation not be an excuse for granting a waiver to a project that is not in the public interest and would cause unacceptable impacts to critical natural resources. The board should consider mitigation requirements similar to those required under the Green Acres diversion rules.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Richard Leister".

Richard Leister, Chair