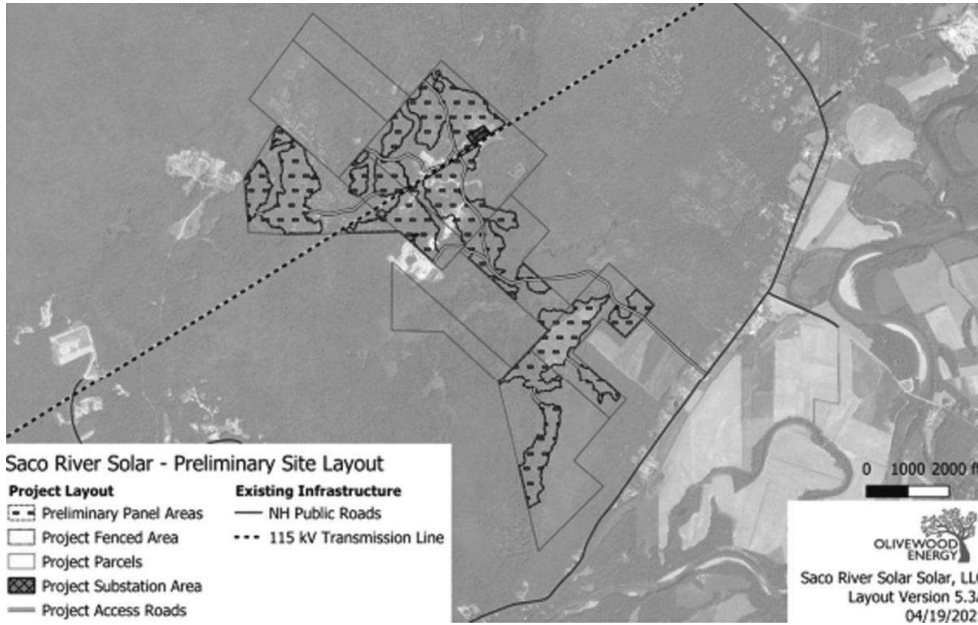


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# Large solar project coming to East Conway Road

Daymond Steer  
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Olivewood Energy is proposing to put a solar project off of East Conway Road. The parcels outlined in red show where the solar project would go and belong to three local families: the Westons, the Garlands and the Woodwards. (OLIVEWOOD ENERGY MAP)

CONWAY — Selectmen recently were briefed about a large solar project coming to East Conway Road.

Selectmen at their April 20 meeting held a public hearing on the East Conway Solar Project proposed by Olivewood Energy which is based in New Haven, Conn.

As proposed, the project will be a 110 MW-AC solar farm that would create enough power for 54,000 New Hampshire residents.



The project is on private land and would cover 355 acres within fenced areas on parcels totaling 1,000 acres.

To put it in perspective, the average 18-hole golf course comprises 150 acres, according to the Environmental Institute for Golf.

From the map developers provided, it appears to be east of Partridge Run Drive and west of Garland Pit Road.

Over 20 years, the project would generate an estimated \$8.2 million in payments in lieu of taxes to the town. Olivewood said the project won't be visible from the commercial areas of North Conway, Conway Lake beaches or the Saco River.

"So we're really excited," said Olivewood Energy's Public Engagement Director Andrew Provencher. "It's a very unique opportunity."

With Provencher was Dominic LeBel, who is Olivewood's director of land management.

Provencher said the land is owned by three local families: the Westons, the Garlands and the Woodwards.

The point of the hearing was to gather feedback from the project from the board and the general public.

"Solar projects don't require additional police presence, additional children in schools, use of sewers, there's no increase in traffic in the long term — the traffic is likely to decline if anything," said LeBel.

"The project would facilitate economic development by providing up to 415 jobs during the construction period, and an increase in economic activity associated with those development activities," said Label.

"This project also facilitates clean air and clean water by providing a large amount of clean energy to help us avoid carbon emissions. And we are also currently exploring the potential for land in and around the project area to be placed into either temporary or permanent conservation."



As for the payment in lieu of taxes program, Label said, "This helps us to avoid any sort of feature disputes over valuation. And projects like these can be quite difficult to assess."

At the start of construction, the project would pay pay \$193,500 annually. Once operations starts, the project would pay \$383,000 per year over the first 10 years then the rate would go up by 2.5 percent annually from years 10-20.

Chairman David Weathers asked about visibility from River Street and impacts on vernal pools.

Label said that it would be minimally visible from River Street because the project would be screened by vegetation. He said the project would stay away from vernal pools.

In response to security questions, Label said individual solar panel area will be fenced and the bottom of the fence will be raised to allow the passage of wildlife.

"No matter where you go, there are teenagers who do dumb things like climb fences or throw bottles or other not very smart things," said Label.

Asked by Weathers when the construction could start, Label replied they would hope to start construction in 2023 and be done in 2024.

State Rep. Karen Umberger (R-Conway), who joined in the meeting by Zoom, said it sounded like a "wonderful project" to her.

Provencher in an email Tuesday said Olivewood is at the beginning of a long process.

"The town will continue to have input on the design and operation of the proposed project even with the project having a capacity above 30 megawatts, requiring the project to be permitted through the New Hampshire Site Evaluation Committee process," said Provencher.

"The project would seek to work directly with the town on a Memorandum of Understanding that will incorporate local input and considerations and create binding obligations on the project. This process will include public information sessions and additional field studies, engineering and expert reports," Provecher said.

On Tuesday, Provenchar told the Sun: "Saco River Solar would be located off of Garland Pit Road in East Conway. There are no signs or markings along the road currently indicating the proposed project's location, and we would work directly with the Town of Conway on the appropriate amounts and locations for signs relating to the project during the MOU process.

"At its closest point, the project would be located more than 1,000 feet from East Conway Road, and primarily screened by existing vegetation.



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