

STATE OF THE REGION

About this story: This report on solar energy is part of a continuing series of conversations on important business topics created and moderated by Phillips Lytle LLP.

GREEN ENERGY

ONCE SCORNED, SOLAR FARMS KEY TO STATE'S ENERGY REFORMS

Communities, especially rural ones, require details about what's happening to thousands of acres

BY JAMES FINK
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Solar farms, once questioned by local communities, are becoming common developments and at the center of New York's multi-phased approach to becoming more green-energy efficient.

That was the opinion of five panelists who participated in the March 15 State of the Region "Maximizing Solar Development in 2022" discussion, presented by Phillips Lytle LLP and Buffalo Business First.

Kimberly Nason, partner, Phillips Lytle LLP, moderated the panel. The panelists were:

- ▶ Paul Curran, managing director, BQ Energy LLC
- ▶ Richard Dixon, CFO, County of



1 PHILLIPS LYTLE LLP



2 BQ ENERGY LLC



3 CHAUTAUQUA IDA

1. Kimberly Nason, partner, Phillips Lytle LLP, 2. Paul Curran, managing director, BQ Energy LLC 3. Richard Dixon, CFO, County of Chautauqua Industrial Development Agency

Chautauqua Industrial Development Agency

- ▶ Andrew Reilly, director of planning and environmental services, Wendel Cos.
- ▶ Benjamin Wang, special assistant, New York State Office of Renewable Energy Siting (ORES)

The focus on solar energy is part of New York's efforts to create 6,000 megawatts of new solar sources by 2025 and a goal of reaching 70% renewable energy sources by 2030 as well as an 85% reduction in demand for traditional energy sources by 2050.

"The problem is, there aren't enough projects going to meet those goals," Nason said.

Wang said his two-year-old office has issued four permits this year: three for large-scale solar farms and one for a wind farm. Twelve permits are under review.

To streamline the state-approval process, a one-stop regulatory review was created, called the 94-c process. Previous state processes were viewed as arduous and complicated, but Wang said the new review is user-friendly.

"It provides the applicant a very easy way to understand the permitting process," he said.

One change is a pledge to have a final decision rendered in one year. The key, he said, is an open communication among developers, the state and local municipalities.

"Understand this, many of these are the largest projects that some of these communities have seen or will see," Reilly said. "In some cases, you are talking about one project using thousands of acres of land."

Curran said the growth of the solar farm industry has made it easier for communities, especially rural towns, to grasp the project.

"Everybody knows what solar panels look like," Curran said. "The more you talk, the better. The more you discuss, the better."

Dixon said communication was a key factor in ConnectGen LLC of Houston winning local approval and IDA tax breaks for a planned 270-megawatt solar farm and 20-megawatt battery storage center on 1,500 acres off Miller Road in the Town of Ripley. ConnectGen is investing \$348.48 million in the project, making it the region's largest solar farm development.

"There are benefits to the town and



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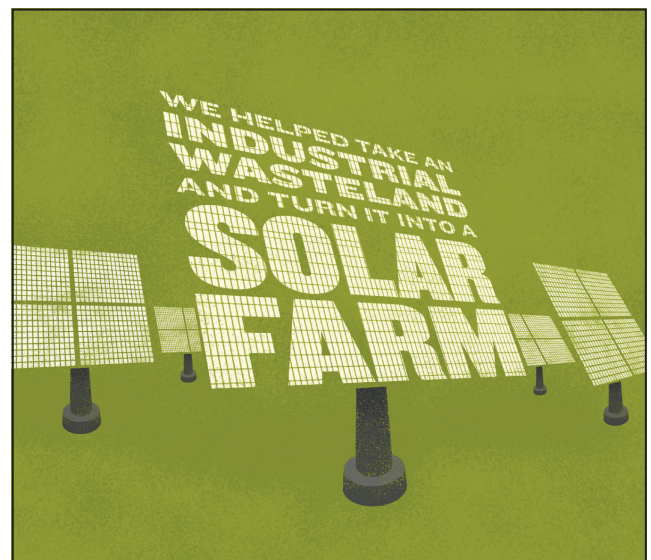
5 NYS ORES

4. Andrew Reilly, director of planning and environmental services, Wendel Cos. 5. Benjamin Wang, special assistant, New York State Office of Renewable Energy Siting

the landowners," Dixon said. "Solar farms don't put extra pressure on school districts or fire companies. You have to look at them as a win-win. But (the County of Chautauqua IDA) won't get involved in a project unless

the town wants us to get involved." Dixon said with more emphasis on renewable and green energy, more education is needed.

"People need to know the reality, the facts and the benefits," Nason said.



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MAXIMIZING SOLAR DEVELOPMENT IN 2022: A CONVERSATION WITH KEY INDUSTRY LEADERS



Wednesday, March 16, 2022 | 10:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. | VIRTUAL



Solar energy will play a critical role in reaching New York State’s CLCPA clean energy and climate goals for 2030. Hear from market leaders on how developers and businesses can overcome challenges and prepare for what’s needed to effectively meet future energy goals.

Topics to be discussed include:

- Challenges in project development including regulatory issues, land use issues and neighborhood opposition
- Overviews of solar development opportunities including the Office of Renewable Energy Siting (ORES) process
- Regulatory and finance perspectives on solar projects
- Understanding the PILOT process
- The Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) impact

To register, please visit www.bizjournals.com/buffalo/event/167624/2022/state-of-the-region-maximizing-solar-development-in-2022 or contact jhoule@bizjournals.com.

Panelists



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