

Town of Holland

Sheboygan County, Wisconsin

W3005 County Road G, Cedar Grove, WI 53013

Docket 9805-CE-100 Comments
Public Service Commission
P.O. Box 7854
Madison, WI 53707-7854

Subject: **Docket 9805-CE-100 Comments: Support for Onion River Solar**

February 15, 2021

Dear Public Service Commission Members:

BACKGROUND:

The Town of Holland board members were contacted more than 2 years ago by Ranger Power. Three members of Ranger Power were present for this introduction within a regularly scheduled board meeting with some traveling from out of state. The purpose was to provide background on Ranger Power, discuss the potential for a solar electrical utility within the township, explain the process for evaluating project feasibility, and to obtain initial feedback from the board. The board had heard of other potential alternative energy projects in the years leading up to this meeting; all of them never materialized. The board felt that this contact was a very preliminary inquiry and, based upon prior experience, was unlikely to proceed to completion. The board, however, was not opposed to considering a solar electric utility within the township.

Ranger Power continued to work on the due diligence associated with this potential solar utility by identifying potential landowners who might be willing to lease land for the project. When it became clear that there was sufficient interest on the part of landowners, Ranger Power again requested time with the town board in a regularly scheduled board meeting to brief the board on the progress. From this point forward, the meetings became more frequent as the project moved from evaluation to preparation of the submittal to the WI PSC. At about this time Ranger Power formed Onion River Solar, LLC as the official owner of this project.

The town board used this early project time to familiarize itself with the applicable state statutes and regulations. The board questions the wisdom of the state legislature's decision to remove all control from local elected officials and placing it in the hands of unelected people that are geographically distant from the township and likely unfamiliar with the culture and priorities of the people in the township. The town board set out to identify and pursue the actions that are permitted within the state statutes and applicable regulation to protect the interests of a large majority of the town property owners and residents. The board chose to adopt an approach recommended earlier by Ranger Power representatives; namely, a Joint Development Agreement (JDA).

JOINT DEVELOPMENT AGREEMENT:

In approximately February of 2020, Ranger Power provided the Town of Holland board with a copy of a draft JDA between Ranger Power and Jefferson County regarding a different project. The town board invested several months, also inviting participation by Sheboygan County, in carefully reviewing and editing the document, thus making it suitable for use in our township and county. In April 2020, the town board shared the working draft JDA with Ranger Power and we collectively started the process of negotiating and editing this working draft in May 2020. Although 3 or 4 significant obstacles arose that threatened to derail the JDA, both Ranger Power and the town board were able to work through these issues and find solutions by examining the motivations and needs of both parties. The process was substantially complete by September 2020 and the Joint Development Agreement was signed by all parties on November 9, 2020.

While the JDA was in the negotiation process, Ranger Power announced that an agreement had been reached with Alliant Energy for them to acquire Onion River Solar after the construction of the project was complete.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATION OF THE TOWN BOARD:

The Town of Holland board:

- Recognizes the need for more renewable energy
- Understands that the Wisconsin legislature placed the regulatory authority with the WI PSC, leaving a Joint Development Agreement as the local municipality's only means of obtaining assurances and commitments to protect the community
- Appreciates the efforts made by Ranger Power and Onion River Solar with respect to keeping the lines of communication open, sharing information, and negotiating the Joint Development Agreement in good faith
- Believes that Alliant Energy will be a good partner in this renewable energy plant in the Town of Holland
- Has reviewed the town's Comprehensive Plan and finds that renewable energy and the vision presented in this plan are consistent with one another
- Believes the stable and cost-effective source of electrical power in our community will benefit all residents of the township
- Finds that the shared revenues will benefit all residents of the township through favorable impacts on the property tax levies in the years after the project comes online
- Appreciates that the Onion River Solar project provides participating landowners, almost entirely independent farmers, with a reliable, long-term, supplemental source of income
- Has determined that the unfavorable impacts on non-participating landowners and neighbors have been mitigated to the extent practicable within the JDA

- Finds that the JDA adequately protects the township throughout the life of the project in all reasonably foreseeable circumstances

The town board has made the above findings together with the fact that there have been very few residents or property owners who, once they learned the facts surrounding this matter, spoke in opposition to the project to the board. Therefore, the Town of Holland board recommends the approval of this project.

Signed this 15th day of February, 2021.

TOWN OF HOLLAND



Donald W. Becker, Town Chairman



Doug Hamilton, Town Supervisor



David Huenink, Town Supervisor



Stephen Jones, Town Supervisor

ATTEST:



Janelle Kaiser, Town Clerk

(Recused)

Stanley Lammers, Town Supervisor