

**Town of Independence  
Local Law No. 2 of 2019**

**Town of Independence Solar Energy Systems and Facilities Local Law**

**Article 1. Authority**

This Solar Energy Local Law is adopted pursuant to sections 261-263 of the Town Law and section 20 of the Municipal Home Rule Law of the State of New York, which authorize the Town to adopt zoning provisions that advance and protect the health, safety and welfare of the community, and, in accordance with the Town Law of New York State, "to make provision for, so far as conditions may permit, the accommodation of solar energy systems, facilities and equipment and access to sunlight necessary therefor."

**Article 2. Statement of Purpose**

This Solar Energy Systems and Facilities Local Law is adopted to advance and protect the public health, safety, and welfare of the Town of Independence by creating regulations for the installation and use of solar energy generating systems and equipment, with the following objectives:

1. To take advantage of a safe, abundant, renewable and non-polluting energy resource;
2. To decrease the cost of electricity to the owners of residential and commercial properties, including single-family houses;
3. To increase employment and business development in the Town of Independence, to the extent reasonably practical, by furthering the installation of Solar Energy Systems and Facilities;
4. To mitigate the impacts of Solar Energy Systems and Facilities on environmental resources such as important agricultural lands, forests, wildlife and other protected resources, and;
5. To create synergy between solar energy systems and facilities, vacant land management, and creating a walkable, healthy community, etc.

**Article 3. Definitions**

**BUILDING-INTEGRATED SOLAR ENERGY SYSTEM:** A combination of Solar Panels and Solar Energy Equipment integrated into any building envelope system such as vertical facades, semitransparent skylight systems, roofing materials, or shading over windows, which produce electricity for onsite consumption.

**FARMLAND OF STATEWIDE IMPORTANCE:** Land, designated as "Farmland of Statewide Importance" in the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)'s Soil Survey Geographic (SSURGO) Database on Web Soil Survey, that is of state wide importance for the production of food, feed, fiber, forage, and oilseed crops as determined by the appropriate state agency or agencies. Farmland of Statewide Importance may include tracts of land that have been designated for agriculture by state law.

GLARE: The effect by reflections of light with intensity sufficient as determined in a commercially reasonable manner to cause annoyance, discomfort, or loss in visual performance and visibility in any material respects.

GROUND-MOUNTED SOLAR ENERGY SYSTEM OR FACILITY: A Solar Energy System or Facility that is anchored to the ground via a pole or other mounting system, detached from any other structure, that generates electricity for onsite or offsite consumption.

NATIVE PERENNIAL VEGETATION: native wildflowers, forbs, and grasses that serve as habitat, forage, and migratory way stations for pollinators and shall not include any prohibited or regulated invasive species as determined by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.

POLLINATOR: bees, birds, bats, and other insects or wildlife that pollinate flowering plants, and includes both wild and managed insects.

PRIME FARMLAND: Land, designated as "Prime Farmland" in the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)'s Soil Survey Geographic (SSURGO) Database on Web Soil Survey, that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops and is also available for these land uses.

ROOF-MOUNTED SOLAR ENERGY SYSTEM OR FACILITY: A Solar Energy System/ Facility located on the roof of any legally permitted building or structure that produces electricity for onsite or offsite consumption.

SOLAR ACCESS: Space open to the sun and clear of overhangs or shade so as to permit the use of active and/or passive Solar Energy Systems on individual properties.

SOLAR LOT: Referring to the area included in an application for a solar energy facility permit, and being adequately described for inclusion in a deed capable of being recorded in the Allegany County Clerk's Office.

SOLAR ENERGY EQUIPMENT: Electrical material, hardware, inverters, conduit, storage devices, or other electrical and photovoltaic equipment associated with the production of electricity.

SOLAR ENERGY SYSTEM OR FACILITY: The components and subsystems required to convert solar energy into electric energy suitable for use. The term includes, but is not limited to, Solar Panels and Solar Energy Equipment. The area of a Solar Energy System or Facility includes all the land inside the perimeter of the Solar Energy System/Facility, which extends to any interconnection equipment. A Solar Energy System/Facility is classified as a Tier 1, Tier 2, or Tier 3 Solar Energy System/Facility as follows:

1. Tier 1 Solar Energy Systems/Facilities include the following:
  - a. Roof-Mounted Solar Energy Systems/Facilities;
  - b. Building-Integrated Solar Energy Systems/Facilities;

2. Tier 2 Solar Energy Systems/Facilities include Ground-Mounted Solar Energy Systems/Facilities with a total surface area of all solar panels on the lot of up to 4,000 square feet and that generate up to 110% of the electricity consumed on the site over the previous 12 months.
3. Tier 3 Solar Energy Systems/Facilities are systems that are not included in the list for Tier 1 and Tier 2 Solar Energy Systems/Facilities.

**SOLAR PANEL:** A photovoltaic device capable of collecting and converting solar energy into electricity.

**STORAGE BATTERY:** A device that stores energy and makes it available in an electrical form.

#### **Article 4. Applicability**

1. The requirements of this Local Law shall apply to all Solar Energy Systems/Facilities permitted, installed, or modified in the Town of Independence after the effective date of this Local Law, excluding general maintenance and repair.
2. Solar Energy Systems/Facilities with a letter of support from the Allegany County Planning Board, constructed or installed prior to the effective date of this Local Law will require only approval by the Town Board and are exempt from section 8.A.3.
3. Modifications to an existing Solar Energy System/Facility that increase the Solar Energy System/Facility area by more than 5% of the original area of the Solar Energy System/Facility (exclusive of moving any fencing) shall be subject to this Local Law.
4. All Solar Energy Systems/Facilities shall be designed, erected, and installed in accordance with all applicable codes, regulations, and industry standards as referenced in the NYS Uniform Fire Prevention and Building Code ("Building Code"), the NYS Energy Conservation Code ("Energy Code").

#### **Article 5. General Requirements**

1. A building permit shall be required for installation of all Solar Energy Systems/Facilities.
2. Local land use boards are encouraged to condition their approval of proposed developments on sites adjacent to Solar Energy Systems/Facilities so as to protect their access to sufficient sunlight to remain economically feasible over time.
3. Issuance of permits and approvals by the Town Board shall include review pursuant to the State Environmental Quality Review Act [ECL Article 8 and its implementing regulations at 6 NYCRR Part 617 ("SEQRA")].

#### **Article 6. Permitting Requirements for Tier 1 Solar Energy Systems**

All Tier 1 Solar Energy Systems/Facilities shall be permitted in all areas of the Town, and shall be exempt from site plan review if such Site Plan Review procedures are adopted in the future by

the Town of Independence, subject to the following conditions for each type of Solar Energy Systems/Facilities:

1. Roof-Mounted Solar Energy Systems/Facilities:
  - a. Roof-Mounted Solar Energy Systems/Facilities shall incorporate, when feasible, the following design requirements:
    - i. Solar Panels on pitched roofs shall be mounted with a maximum distance of 8 inches between the roof surface and the highest edge of the system.
    - ii. Solar Panels on pitched roofs shall be installed parallel to the roof surface on which they are mounted or attached.
    - iii. Solar Panels on pitched roofs shall not extend higher than the highest point of the roof surface on which they are mounted or attached.
    - iv. Solar Panels on flat roofs shall not extend above the top of the surrounding parapet, or more than 24 inches above the flat surface of the roof, whichever is higher.
  - b. Glare: All Solar Panels shall have anti-reflective coating(s).
  - c. Height: All Roof-Mounted Solar Energy Systems shall comply with the height limitations in Appendix 3.
2. Building-Integrated Solar Energy Systems/Facilities shall be shown on the plans submitted for the building permit application for the building containing the system/facility.

#### **Article 7. Permitting Requirements for Tier 2 Solar Energy Systems/Facilities**

All Tier 2 Solar Energy Systems/Facilities shall be permitted in all areas of the Town as accessory structures and shall be exempt from site plan review or other land use regulations, if such Site Plan Review procedures are adopted in the future by the Town of Independence, subject to the following conditions:

1. Glare: All Solar Panels shall have anti-reflective coating(s).
2. Setbacks: Tier 2 Solar Energy Systems/Facilities shall be subject to the setback regulations specified for the accessory structures under the Building Code. All Ground-Mounted Solar Energy Systems/Facilities shall only be installed in the side or rear yards of residential structures.
3. Height: Tier 2 Solar Energy Systems/Facilities shall comply with the height limitations in Appendix 3.
4. Screening and Visibility.
  - a. All Tier 2 Solar Energy Systems/Facilities shall have views minimized from adjacent properties to the extent reasonably practicable.
  - b. Solar Energy Equipment shall be located in a manner to reasonably avoid and/or minimize blockage of views from surrounding properties and shading of property to the north, while still providing adequate solar access.
5. Lot Size: Tier 2 Solar Energy Systems/Facilities shall comply with the existing lot size requirement specified for accessory structures within the neighborhoods listed in Appendix 1 to this local law.

## **Article 8. Permitting requirements for Tier 3 Solar Energy Systems/Facilities**

All Tier 3 Solar Energy Systems/Facilities are permitted through the issuance of a special permit within the neighborhoods designated in the Appendices to this Local Law, and subject to the application requirements set forth in this Section.

1. Applications for the installation of Tier 3 Solar Energy System/Facility shall be:
  - a. Reviewed by the Code Enforcement Officer or Town Board for completeness. Applicants shall be advised within 10 business days of the completeness of their application or any deficiencies that must be addressed prior to substantive review.
  - b. Subject to a requirement for a public hearing to hear all comments for and against the application. The Town Board of the Town of Independence shall have a notice printed in a newspaper of general circulation in the Town at least 5 days in advance of such hearing. Applicants shall have delivered the notice by first class mail to adjoining landowners or landowners within 200 feet of the property at least 10 days prior to such a hearing. Proof of mailing shall be provided to the Town Board at the public hearing.
  - c. Referred to the Allegany County Planning Board pursuant to General Municipal Law § 239-m if required.
  - d. Upon closing of the public hearing, the Town Board shall take action on the application within 62 days of the public hearing, which can include approval, approval with conditions, or denial. The 62-day period may be extended upon consent by both the Town Board and applicant.
2. Underground Requirements. All on-site utility lines shall be placed underground to the extent feasible and as permitted by the serving utility, with the exception of the main service connection at the utility company right-of-way and any new interconnection equipment, including without limitation any poles, with new easements and right-of-way.
3. Vehicular Paths. Vehicular paths within the site shall be designed to minimize the extent of impervious materials and soil compaction.
4. Signage.
  - a. No signage or graphic content shall be displayed on the Solar Energy Systems/Facilities except the manufacturer's name, equipment specification information, safety information, and 24-hour emergency contact information. Said information shall be depicted within an area no more than 8 square feet.
  - b. As required by National Electric Code (NEC), disconnect and other emergency shutoff information shall be clearly displayed on a light reflective surface. A clearly visible warning sign concerning voltage shall be placed at the base of all pad-mounted transformers and substations.
5. Glare. All Solar Panels shall have anti-reflective coating(s).
6. Lighting. Lighting of the Solar Energy Systems/Facilities shall be limited to that minimally required for safety and operational purposes and shall be reasonably shielded and downcast from abutting properties.
7. Deleted.
8. Decommissioning.
  - a. Solar Energy Systems/Facilities that have been abandoned and/or not producing electricity for a period of 1 year shall be removed at the Owner and/or Operators

expense, which at the Owner's option may come from any security made with the Town as set forth in Section 10(b) herein.

- b. A decommissioning plan (see Appendix 4) signed by the owner and/or operator of the Solar Energy System/Facility shall be submitted by the applicant, addressing the following:
  - i. The cost of removing the Solar Energy System/Facility.
  - ii. The time required to decommission and remove the Solar Energy System/Facility, including any ancillary structures.
  - iii. The time required to repair any damage caused to the property by the installation and removal of the Solar Energy System/Facility.

9. Security.

- a. The deposit, executions, or filing with the Town Clerk of cash, bond, or other form of security reasonably acceptable to the Town attorney and/or engineer, shall be in an amount sufficient to ensure the good faith performance of the terms and conditions of the permit issued pursuant hereto and to provide for the removal and restorations of the site subsequent to removal. The amount of the bond or security shall be 125% of the cost of removal of the Tier 3 Solar Energy System/Facility and restoration of the property with an escalator of 2% annually for the life of the Solar Energy System/Facility. The decommissioning amount shall not be reduced by the amount of the estimated salvage value of the Solar Energy System/Facility, as the salvage value of the solar energy equipment is speculative.
- b. In the event of default upon performance of such conditions, after proper notice and expiration of any cure periods, the cash deposit, bond, or security shall be forfeited to the Town, which shall be entitled to maintain an action thereon. The cash deposit, bond, or security shall remain in full force and effect until restoration of the property as set forth in the decommissioning plan is completed.
- c. In the event of default or abandonment of the Solar Energy System/Facility, the system shall be decommissioned as set forth in Section 10(b) and 10(c) herein.

10. Site plan application. For any Solar Energy system/facility requiring a Special Permit, site plan approval shall be required. Any site plan application shall include the following information:

- a. Property lines and physical features, including roads, for the project site
- b. Proposed changes to the landscape of the site, grading, vegetation clearing and planting, exterior lighting, and screening vegetation or structures
- c. One-line or three-line electrical diagram detailing the Solar Energy System/facility layout, solar collector installation, associated components, and electrical interconnection methods, with all National Electrical Code compliant disconnects and other current devices.
- d. A preliminary equipment specification sheet that documents all proposed solar panels, significant components, mounting systems, and inverters that are to be installed. A final equipment specification sheet shall be submitted prior to the issuance of building permit.
- e. Name, address, and contact information of proposed or potential system installer and the owner and/or operator of the Solar Energy System/Facility. Such information of the final system installer shall be submitted prior to the issuance of any building permit.

- f. Name, address, phone number, and signature of the project applicant, as well as all the property owners, demonstrating their consent to the application and the use of their real property for the Solar Energy System/Facility.
- g. Property Operation and Maintenance Plan. Such plan shall describe continuing photovoltaic maintenance and property upkeep, such as mowing and trimming.
- h. Erosion and sediment control and storm water management plans prepared to New York State Department of Environmental Conservation standards, if applicable, and to such standards as may be established by the Town Board, or by the Town Planning Board, if such a Town Planning Board is subsequently established.
- i. Prior to the issuance of the building permit or final approval by the Town Board, but not required as part of the application, engineering documents must be signed and sealed by a New York State (NYS) Licensed Professional Engineer or NYS Registered Architect.

11. Special Permit Standards.

- a. Lot size
  - i. The property on which the Tier 3 Solar Energy System/Facility is placed shall meet the lot size requirements in Appendix 1.
- b. Setbacks
  - i. The Tier 3 Solar Energy Systems/Facilities shall meet the setback requirements in Appendix 2.
- c. Height
  - i. The Tier 3 Solar Energy Systems/Facilities shall comply with the height limitations in Appendix 3 depending on the underlying neighborhood/district.
- d. Lot coverage
  - i. The following components of a Tier 3 Solar Energy System/Facility shall be considered included in the calculations for lot coverage requirements:
    - 1. Foundation systems, typically consisting of driven piles or monopoles or helical screws with or without small concrete collars.
    - 2. All mechanical equipment of the Solar Energy System/Facility, including any pad mounted structure for batteries, switchboard, transformers, or storage cells.
    - 3. Paved access roads servicing the Solar Energy System/Facility.
- e. Lot coverage of the Solar Energy System/Facility, as defined above, shall not exceed the maximum lot coverage requirement of the underlying neighborhood/district schedule.
- f. Fencing Requirements. All mechanical equipment, including any structure for storage batteries, shall be enclosed by a 7-foot-high fence, as required by NEC, with a self-locking gate to prevent unauthorized access.
- g. Screening and Visibility.
  - i. Solar Energy Systems/Facilities smaller than 10 acres shall have views minimized from adjacent properties to the extent reasonably practicable using architectural features, earth berms, landscaping, or other screening methods that will harmonize with the character of the property and surrounding area.
  - ii. Solar Energy Systems/Facilities larger than 10 acres shall be required to:
    - 1. Conduct a visual assessment of the visual impacts of the Solar Energy System/Facility on public roadways and adjacent

properties. At a minimum, a line-of-sight profile analysis shall be provided. Depending upon the scope and potential significance of the visual impacts, additional impact analyses, including for example a digital viewshed report may be required to be submitted by the applicant.

2. Submit a screening & landscaping plan to show adequate measures to screen through landscaping, grading, or other means so that views of Solar Panels and Solar Energy Equipment shall be minimized as reasonably practical from public roadways and adjacent properties to the extent feasible.
3. The screening & landscaping plan shall specify the locations, elevations, height, plant species, and/or materials that will comprise the structures, landscaping, and/or grading used to screen and/or mitigate any adverse aesthetic effects of the system/facility. The landscaped screening shall be comprised of a minimum of 1 evergreen tree, at least 6 feet high at time of planting, plus 2 supplemental shrubs at the reasonable discretion of the Town Board, all planted within each 10 linear feet of the Solar Energy System/Facility. Existing vegetation may be used to satisfy all or a portion of the required landscaped screening. A list of suitable evergreen tree and shrub species should be provided by the Town.

h. Agricultural Resources. For projects located on agricultural lands:

- i. Any Tier 3 Solar Energy System/Facility located on the areas that consist of Prime Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance shall not exceed 50% of the portion of the lot consisting of prime farm land or farmland of statewide importance.
  - ii. Tier 3 Solar Energy Systems/Facilities on Prime Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance shall be required to seed 20% of the total surface area of all solar panels on the lot with native perennial vegetation designed to attract pollinators.
  - iii. To the maximum extent practicable, Tier 3 Solar Energy Systems/Facilities located on Prime Farmland shall be constructed in accordance with the construction requirements of the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets.
  - iv. Tier 3 Solar Energy System/Facilities owners shall develop, implement, and maintain native vegetation to the extent practicable pursuant to a vegetation management plan by providing native perennial vegetation and foraging habitat beneficial to game birds, songbirds, and pollinators. To the extent practicable, when establishing perennial vegetation and beneficial foraging habitat, the owners shall use native plant species and seed mixes.
12. Ownership Changes. If the owner or operator of the Solar Energy System/Facility changes or the owner of the property changes, the special use permit shall remain in effect, provided that the successor owner or operator assumes in writing all of the obligations of the special permit and decommissioning plan. A new owner or operator of the Solar Energy System shall notify the Town Supervisor of such change in ownership or operator within 30 days of the ownership change.



## **Article 9. Safety**

1. Solar Energy Systems and Solar Energy Equipment shall be certified under the applicable electrical and/or building codes as required.
2. Solar Energy Systems shall be maintained in good working order and in accordance with industry standards. Site access shall be maintained, including snow removal at a level acceptable to the local fire department and, if the Tier 3 Solar Energy System is located in an ambulance district, the local ambulance corps.
3. If Storage Batteries are included as part of the Solar Energy System, they shall meet the requirements of any applicable fire prevention and building code when in use and, when no longer used, shall be disposed of in accordance with the laws and regulations of the Town and any applicable federal, state, or county laws or regulations.

## **Article 10. Permit Time Frame and Abandonment**

1. The Special Permit and site plan approval for a Solar Energy System shall be valid for a period of 12 months, provided that construction is commenced within that period of time. In the event construction is commenced but not completed within that 12 month period, a yearly renewal permit can be applied for at half the original fee.
2. Upon cessation of electricity generation of a Solar Energy System on a continuous basis for 12 months, the Town may notify and instruct the owner and/or operator of the Solar Energy System to implement the decommissioning plan. The decommissioning plan must be completed within 360 days of such notification.
3. If the owner and/or operator fail to comply with decommissioning upon any abandonment, the Town may, at its discretion, utilize the bond and/or security for the removal of the Solar Energy System and restoration of the site in accordance with the decommissioning plan.

## **Article 11. Enforcement**

Any violation of this Solar Energy Law shall be subject to the same enforcement requirements, including the civil and criminal penalties, provided for in the Town of Independence New York State Uniform Building Code.

## **Article 12. Severability**

The invalidity or unenforceability of any section, subsection, paragraph, sentence, clause, provision, or phrase of the aforementioned sections, as declared by the valid judgment of any court of competent jurisdiction to be unconstitutional, shall not affect the validity or enforceability of any other section, subsection, paragraph, sentence, clause, provision, or phrase, which shall remain in full force and effect.

## APPENDIX 1: LOT SIZE REQUIREMENTS

The following table displays the size requirements of the lot for Ground-Mounted Solar Energy Systems to be permitted.

**Table 1: Minimum Lot Size Requirements**

<b>Neighborhood Predominant Use/District</b>	<b>Tier 3 Solar Energy Systems</b>
See Attached GIS Map	0.5 acres
Agricultural/Residential Usage	10.0 acres

## APPENDIX 2: PARCEL LINE SETBACKS

The following table provides parcel line setback requirements for Ground-Mounted Solar Energy Systems. Fencing, access roads and landscaping may occur within the setback.

**Table 2: Parcel Line Setback Requirements**

Neighborhood Dominant Use District	Tier 3 Ground-Mounted		
	Front	Side	Rear
See Attached GIS Map	100'	100'	100'
Agricultural/Residential District	100'	25'	25'

### APPENDIX 3: HEIGHT REQUIREMENTS

The following table displays height requirements for each type of Solar Energy Systems. The height of systems will be measured from the highest natural grade below each solar panel.

**Table 3: Height Requirements**

	<b>Tier 3 Ground-Mounted</b>	<b>Tier 2</b>	<b>Tier 3</b>
<b>Neighborhood Usage</b>			
See Attached GIS Map	2' above the roof	10'	15'
Agricultural/Residential	2' above the roof	15'	20'

**APPENDIX 4:  
TOWN OF INDEPENDENCE  
SOLAR SYSTEM/FACILITY DECOMMISSIONING PLAN**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Decommissioning Plan for \_\_\_\_\_  
Solar Project Name],

located at: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

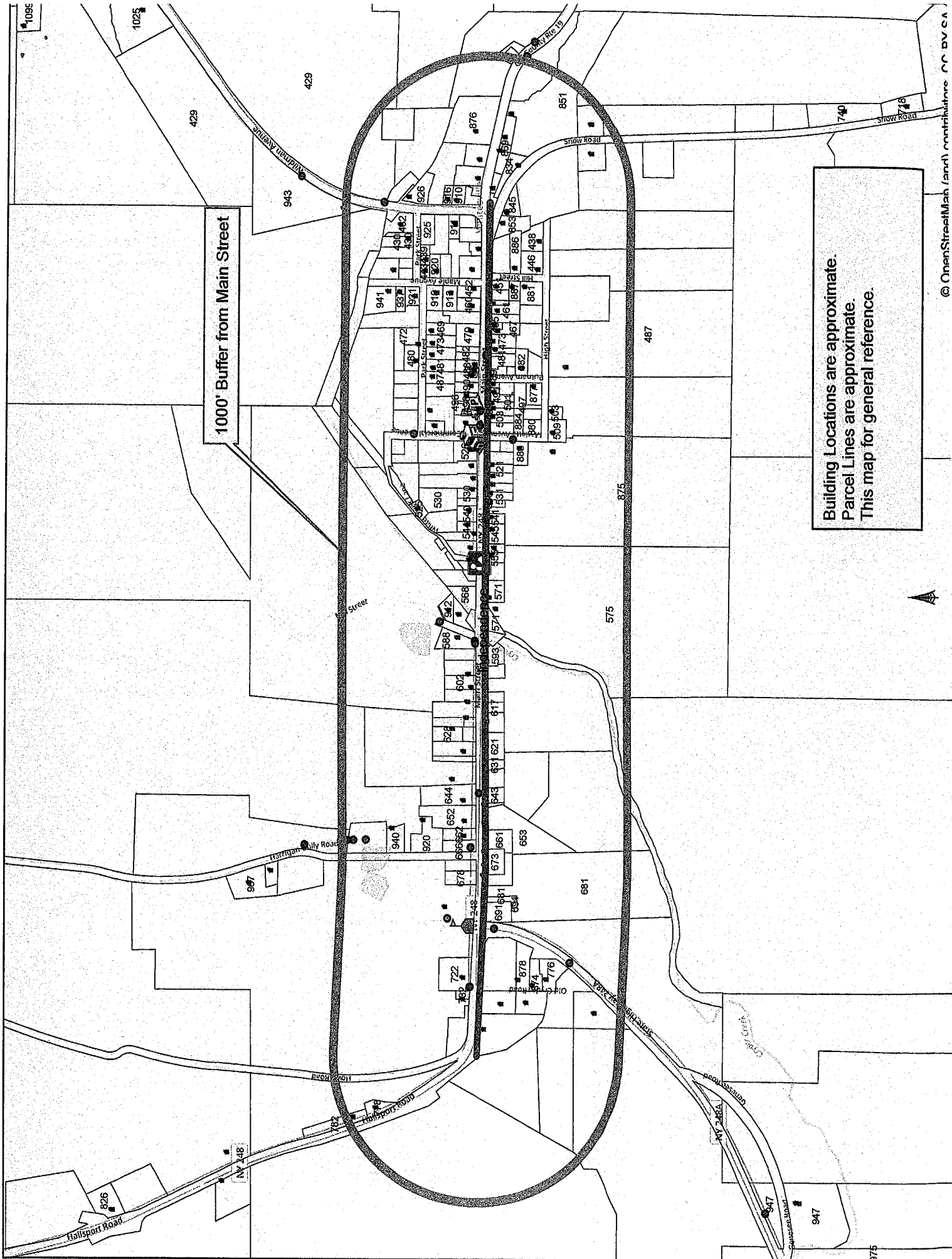
Prepared and Submitted by [Solar Developer Name], the owner of [Solar Farm Name]  
As required by The Town of Independence, [Solar Developer Name] presents this  
decommissioning plan for [Solar Project Name] (the "Facility").  
Decommissioning will occur as a result of any of the following conditions:

1. The land lease, if any, ends;
2. The system does not produce power for 12 months; or
3. The system is damaged and will not be repaired or replaced.
4. The owner of the Facility, as provided for in its lease with the landowner, shall restore the property to its condition as it existed before the Facility was installed, pursuant to which may include the following:
  5. Removal of all operator-owned equipment, concrete, conduits, structures, fencing, and foundations to a depth of 36 inches below the soil surface.
  6. Removal of any solid and hazardous waste caused by the Facility in accordance with local, state and federal waste disposal regulations.
  7. Removal of all graveled areas and access roads unless the landowner requests in writing for it to remain.

All said removal and decommissioning shall occur within 12 months of the Facility ceasing to produce power for sale.

The owner of the Facility, currently \_\_\_\_\_, is responsible for this decommissioning.

Facility Owner Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



1000' Buffer from Main Street

Building Locations are approximate.  
Parcel Lines are approximate.  
This map for general reference.