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TOWN OF TONAWANDA

Solar power law wins approval

Developer planning project praises measure

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The Tonawanda Town Board approved a solar energy law Monday that also won the approval of a developer with a solar project in the pipeline.

"I am very pleased with the final draft and where we stand," Daniel Montante, a director of TM Montante Development, said after the meeting. The developer's Riverview Solar Technology Park includes plans for a 50-acre solar farm to generate power for use on site.

"When people think of building solar farms, we want them to come here," Councilman John A. Bargnesi Jr. said.

The legislation was written with large-and utility-scale solar energy systems in mind. Town officials say they believe Tonawanda may set the bar in the state.

To read the law, go to www.tonawanda.ny.us, then type "solar energy" on the site's search engine.

Development of the legislation, which began in January, didn't always go smoothly.

Last month, Thomas M. Montante, president of Montante Development and Daniel's father, complained that the draft that lawmakers were considering was riddled with "deal killers."

Those contested provisions ... requiring a decommissioning plan with a surety bond and Town Board approval of an ownership change ... have been substantially tempered in the version approved Monday.

At a public hearing preceding the board's vote, Mark Tramont of Louvaine Drive voiced concerns that the law could have the opposite effect of encouraging development.

Tramont said that in conversations with representatives of the State Energy and Research Development Authority, Buffalo Niagara Enterprise and other municipalities, he had been told that Tonawanda's law would send development to other towns.

Despite attempts by Bargnesi to explain the law, Tramont said: "I still think that the idea of any kind of law ... just makes it that much more comfortable for [developers] to go elsewhere."

But Montante, who spoke after Tramont at the public hearing, began: "When we received the first draft, we had very much the same concerns Mr. Tramont did." Describing the process as "acrimonious" at

times, Montante continued: "I'm happy to see the final draft today and see where we are relative to where we began." Afterward, the developer praised town officials for including Montante Development in the process and accommodating many of the changes that were suggested.

"Clearly, this is a big milestone we have walked through today," Montante said.

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