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Pinelands Preservation Alliance protests Stafford solar project

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STAFFORD — The Pinelands Preservation Alliance has shot back at a plan to install solar panels on the capped landfill at Stafford Business Park as a "diversion of open space." and will seek the proper compensation.

Theresa Lettman, director of the monitoring for the alliance, said the project will go back on prior agreements, which stated the area was to be preserved.

"If you decide to move forward with this, the New Jersey Conservation Foundation and the Pinelands Preservation Alliance will assert that this is a diversion of open space, and the compensation that needs to be provided for a disposal of open space, when it is a for-profit project is 4 to 1," said Theresa Lettman, director of monitoring for the alliance.

The plan, which was received by the Pinelands Commission on July 19, calls for the construction of 24,624 solar panels, to will be set on 1,026 arrays or stands.

The plan states panels will generate six megawatts of power for the residential and the commercial aspects of the business park. According to the application, only 1.6 acres will be affected.

"Stafford Township, through its designated redeveloper, Walters Homes Inc. is proposing to beneficially utilize much of the remaining capped portion of the Stafford Township Landfill and adjacent areas to develop a renewable energy project," states the report submitted by the township.

Township Administrator James Moran said talks about a renewable energy project at the business park have been around for a while.

"The previous administrator had plans to do this with Walters," Moran said. "We are in full support of the plan moving forward."

None of the arrays will be mounted in the landfill but rather placed on top, the application states.

"The construction of a solar energy system on the top of a capped landfill requires that the design and construction a be sensitive to the impermeable landfill cap," the application states. "In order to safely install the solar system, no penetration or excavations are proposed on the landfill cap."

Lettman said the use of the landfill, which was not needed for the project to work financially, was supposed to be left as is after it was capped.

"The developer made the argument, during the two years it took to develop the Memorandum of Agreement that all the land other than the landfill was needed to make the project work financially. The landfill was not needed for this financial equation so it was pushed to offset side," Lettman said, explaining that the landfill area was to be left as green space in order to offset the impacts of the development to the wildlife habitat and the Pnelands environment.

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