

Berne solar industry

The Enterprise -- Noah Zweifel From a south-facing vantage point on Switzkill Road, this brush-covered hill belongs to a company that wants to build a solar array there. Canaday Hill Road runs roughly east-west, in the foreground, in front of the house.

BERNE -- The Berne Town Board unanimously approved legislation at a special meeting on Dec. 17 that lays the groundwork for industrial-scale solar facilities, which will be the first permitted industrial-level use in the town.

One company, TJA Clean Energy, has already submitted a letter of intent to the town of Berne, hoping to build a solar farm on the property of 57 Canaday Hill Road, across the street from the Berne firehouse, not far from the Berne-Knox-Westerlo schools on Helderberg Trail.

The company, which is based in New Bedford, Massachusetts, could not immediately be reached for comment.

"[Industrial use] is a huge issue," said Councilwoman Dawn Jordan, who wrote the law, and will be stepping down at the end of her term on Jan. 1, 2020. "It's a significantly different type of construction than what's in the town now."

Because it's the first law of its kind, Jordan told The Enterprise, it will serve as a precedent for future industrial-use regulations in the town of Berne.

The law oversees the fundamental aspects of the development of industrial solar facilities, with sections regulating the application process, special-use permits, design standards, security, and decommissioning.

-- "To allow Town of Berne residents, landowners, farms, and government to take advantage of solar energy resources in a way that is consistent with the nature and character of the Town in accordance with the Town of Berne Comprehensive Plan;

-- "To protect and promote the farmland and agricultural economy and culture;

-- "To ensure farmland and agricultural land are put to their highest and best best use;" and

-- "To protect and promote scenic and environmental resources by minimizing Industrial Scale Solar Energy Facilities" impacts on Berne's scenic and environmental resources as outlined in the Berne Comprehensive Plan"



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"If you look at some solar laws in other towns," Jordan said, "they"re basically like, "Come on in.""

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