

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: March 22, 2024

Subject: Agreement Reached for Buffalo Solar Project in Grundy County

Morris, IL...The Grundy County Board announced that a final agreement has been signed for the Buffalo Solar project. This agreement comes after a court ordered Grundy County to approve a special permit for the project by March 22, 2024. Prior to the order, Grundy County was able to secure significant concessions from Buffalo Solar, thanks to the relentless efforts of the county board and the active involvement of Norman Township residents.

County Board Chairman, Chris Balkema, highlighted the board's initial reservations regarding the Buffalo Solar project: "The Grundy County Board originally voted down the Buffalo Solar project due to concerns about its size and the strong opposition from local residents. However, despite our reservations, state laws imposed by Springfield required us to grant the special use permit."

Chapter 55 of the Illinois Compiled Statutes sets out in 55 ILCS 5/5-12020(g): "a request for siting approval . . . shall be approved if the request is in compliance with the standards and conditions imposed in this Act, the zoning ordinance adopted consistent with this Code, and the conditions imposed under State and federal statutes and regulations." (emphasis added)

Grundy County State's Attorney, Russ Baker, shed light on the legal proceedings: "Not long after the County Board denied the special use permit for the Buffalo Solar project, my office was notified of a lawsuit filed against the county by Buffalo Solar. The company believed that they were entitled to move forward with the project after meeting all of the state's and county's ordinance requirements, and the courts agreed."

Through careful negotiations, Baker continued, "the county was able to secure more concessions from Buffalo Solar to address the concerns of local residents. Buffalo Solar wants to be a good partner and neighbor and has been very accommodating to the concerns of the people of Grundy County."

Buffalo Solar has committed to several important changes to address community concerns, a few of the more notable concessions:

Road Repair Fund: Grundy County has successfully negotiated a road use agreement with Buffalo Solar, resulting in the company depositing \$500,000 into the county's general road fund. This fund will be used to repair or restore any roads that may be damaged during the construction phase of the project, minimizing any strain on local infrastructure.

Improved Landscaping: Buffalo Solar will undertake landscaping enhancements by planting white pines to create barriers around existing homes, ensuring privacy and enhancing the visual appeal of the area.

Resolution of Electronic Issues: Buffalo Solar pledges to promptly resolve any electronic problems caused by the solar farm, ensuring minimal disruption to nearby residents and their electronic devices.

Adherence to Setback Requirements: Buffalo Solar has agreed to adhere to setback requirements from roads, maintaining a safe distance between the project and the roads to enhance safety measures.

All total, there are (25) specific conditions that must be achieved to the satisfaction of the Land Use Department before final approval is granted.

Chairman Balkema further emphasized the county's commitment to monitoring the project's progress: "Grundy County will continue to monitor the Buffalo Solar project to ensure that Buffalo Solar is meeting its obligations."

This agreement underscores Grundy County's commitment to ensuring community needs are met while promoting responsible development. Despite external pressures, the county board and Norman Township residents stood firm in advocating for community welfare, and their efforts have paid off. Chairman Balkema and the county board hope that the state legislature revises the law passed last spring that removed almost all local control on solar and wind farms.

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