



May 6, 2021

Planning Board  
Town of Philipstown  
Cold Spring, NY 10516

To the Planning Board Members,

Thank you for all your extensive attention to the Library's Solar and Walking Path project since last September. Your thoughtful questioning has been much appreciated.

At the Public hearing held for our project in April, questions arose from neighbors about the Library's proposed solar project, and the Public Hearing was held open.

In response to those questions, we attach answers. We also have changed our plan to add additional layered screening plantings to shield the view of the solar array from our neighbors on the west side of Route 9D. We include copies of our revised plan showing the increased plantings - all native shrubs - that we will install.

I have called Mr. Regele and Mr. Copeland and told them of our plans to add additional screening.

We hope that at the continuation of the Public Hearing next week that we will be able to respond to any new questions that arise. Throughout our process of developing this project, we have tried hard to be open and responsive. We want to be an institution that unites rather than divides our community.

Thank you again,

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Anita Prentice".

Anita Prentice  
President, Board of Trustees  
Desmond-Fish Public Library

# Responses to the Philipstown Planning Board

## The Desmond-Fish Public Library Solar Project

1. **The Library wants to put solar panels on our property because we believe in the importance of sustainability for our building, our operations, our town, and our planet.** We have long sought ways to be greener, and we share this value with many in Philipstown. We were able to obtain a New York State grant in 2018 to fund a master site plan to include a solar installation. Our goals were 1) to reduce the Library's reliance on purchased electric power, and 2) to create an attractive solar installation that would reduce the fear with which many people view solar power and that would be an example to the community.
2. **The Library received a grant for the solar project from the State Aid for Library Construction program,** which funded the DFPL due to the fact that the project was part of an integrated vision to create outdoor programming space utilizing the solar array as a feature of a physical learning environment. The Library has applied for two additional grants for the project, one from a private business foundation and one from the State of New York.
3. **The Library decided on a solar ribbon after an extensive and public process.** We issued a Request for Proposals in early 2019 and received eight serious proposals from local and national landscaping/solar firms. The Library selected Pirie Associates of New Haven. Pirie held a community brainstorming session at the Library to gather people's ideas, and ultimately presented to the Trustees and the public three separate possible plans to be assessed. Each proposed plan included a solar element: one with the solar ribbon, one with a covered parking structure, and one with added porticos to the Library building. (The Library's own slate roof would not provide a significant amount of power.) These designs were presented to a community meeting to gather feedback, and were also posted in the Library's Program Room where visitors could view them and comment on them. **More than 85 people viewed the three designs and left comments on various aspects of those designs.**

The Trustees as well as the community preferred the solar ribbon ground array option. In considering a ground array, the Trustees chose to sacrifice some efficiency for the attractive ribbon concept, low to the ground and following the landscape contours. This ribbon idea also enhances another planned element, a wheelchair-accessible walking path made of crushed stone that will meander through the Library grounds and offer residents and patrons a pleasant walking experience. Visitors will be able to appreciate the construction and stability of the solar array.

4. **The Library has recently engaged Suncommon, based on Waterbury, VT and Rhinebeck, NY., to install our project.** Suncommon is a "Gold Status" 2021 NYSERDA Quality Solar Installer and a Certified B Corporation committed to best business practices, with 20 years of experience in solar installation - in Northeast states with harsh winter weather. They have

completed over 8,000 installations. All of the panels and electrical equipment supplied by Suncommon have a **25 year warranty** and an expected useful life in excess of that.

5. **The solar ribbon will blend with the landscape.** Suncommon has recommended the use of bifacial panels, a newer technology enabling panels to look appealing from both sides and absorb sunlight from both sides. Each panel will be 3 ft. 8 in. wide and 6 ft. 4 in. tall. The front edge of each panel will be 18" to 24" from the ground. The height of the back edge of each panel will vary with the contours of the ground. Each panel will be supported by a single post, which will be painted dark green to blend in with the landscape.
6. **At the Planning Board Public Hearing on April 15, a caller expressed his fear that the solar panels might blow away in the wind or subside into the ground.** Suncommon uses high-quality equipment warranted for 25 years and guarantees their labor for 10 years.

The panels are strongly anchored deep in the ground with helical piles, an effective and widely accepted foundation system. The anchor system adheres to New York State and local wind rating building codes. Suncommon's many installations do not lose panels to wind, nor do they anticipate settling that would be noticeable or distract from the beauty of the array. However, in the extremely unlikely event that a solar panel should come off its post or settle, the Library will arrange to have it repaired right away.

7. **At the Planning Board Public Hearing on April 15, a reference was made by a caller to a Scenic Protection Overlay District (SPO).** The Scenic Protection Overlay District is part of Philipstown's zoning code that stretches from the river to and across Route 9D. Any land disturbance in this space requires Planning Board approval, put simply. Part of the solar ribbon array will be located in the Scenic Protection area. The Library has been aware of the SPO from the day project planning began, and so of course has the Planning Board.

This project was also required to obtain Conservation Board approval, which was received in November 2020.

8. **At the Planning Board Public Hearing on April 15, a caller referred to a 2006 Route 9D Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan.** This study was carried out by many local residents with the NYS Department of Transportation in an effort to reduce dangerous truck traffic on Route 9D primarily in Garrison. The speed limit was lowered and a traffic light installed in front of the Garrison School as a result of the efforts of this plan. While the report talks about the beauties of nature along Route 9D and lists historic properties (not including the Library), it does not prevent the installation of solar panels.
9. **At the Planning Board Public Hearing on April 15, a caller invoked the memory of Mrs. Alice Desmond and said she would not approve of solar panels.** Alice Desmond, the co-founder of the Library and donor of its endowment, travelled widely around the world and

celebrated the beauty of the natural environment in her many photographs and books. She also cared deeply for children, founding the library on behalf of the children of Philipstown. While it is impossible to project her sentiments about a solar array (or about computers, the Internet, or Smartphones), she would have cared deeply about the future of our planet and favored combating climate change to ensure that the beauty of our region would be preserved for children of the future.

10. **The Library will NOT be selling power to Central Hudson.** The solar ribbon array will supply an estimated 65-70% of the Library's requirements. If there is ever any seasonal excess production, it is credited to the Library's Central Hudson account in a process known as "net metering."
11. **The Library could install solar panels in a less visible location on Library property, but prefers the solar ribbon.** Solar panels installed in the alternative area would need to be in a standard rectangular array formation and lose the sculptural appeal of the ribbon. Our goal is to create a unique solar array.
12. **The Library will install screening plantings to shield the panels from Route 9D, in response to neighbors' expressed concerns.** Our plan as originally submitted included some additional planting along Meadow Lane and Route 9D, and we are increasing the density with layered plantings that will shield the array and not be a distraction to cars driving on Route 9D.. We will use native shrubs for this purpose.
13. **At the Planning Board Public Hearing on April 15, a question was asked about whether the Library should have a decommissioning bond. We do not believe so.** A decommissioning bond is designed to capture some resources from an entity such as a factory that might go bust and abandon infrastructure. The Library is not going anywhere, and our plan is to take good care of our array to help it last a long time. NYSERDA has guidelines for decommissioning bonds; the cost to the Library for a solar project of this small scale is less than \$5,000, so we can obtain one if the Planning Board feels it is necessary. Solar firms we have spoken with doubt that one is necessary given that we are a local institution of long standing..
14. **The Library believes it is in our mission to install solar panels in a visible location.** Libraries are educational institutions; we are chartered by the State Board of Regents. Everything we do is a teaching/learning experience. Many people are curious about or frightened of solar energy: of the cost, of the appearance, of the physical stability, of the reliability. If our project can reassure people about the viability of a solar installation, then we will consider that our educational mission is fulfilled. And our planet will be the beneficiary.

*May 6, 2021*