

Mono asks Premier to promote rooftop solar over solar farms

Mono Mayor Laura Ryan has written Premier Kathleen Wynne to change the current provincial policy favouring construction of solar farms, contending it should instead promote rooftop solar panels.

In a letter dated Jan. 25, Ryan noted that Mono has been "very successful in preserving the pristine environmental character and biodiversity" of its terrain and water resources and said the Town is "a big supporter of the Province's green initiatives."

But while the government's Large Renewable Procurement (LRP) program was in alignment with Mono's views, "there are some issues with the program . . . which go against the 'green ideal' to which all parties are dedicated."

The Mayor said the current provincial policy "sacrifices valuable farmland by encouraging the development of solar farms over rooftop applications. The Town of Mono requests a change in policy so that more flat roof buildings and developments will be used for solar power generation to support the province's energy needs."

In addition, "the current Developmental Charges Act generates conflict within our community, misuses Ontario farmland (a rapidly diminishing resource), and wastes major solar real estate (which already exists in the form of rooftops). A solar development on a rooftop requires a building permit, triggering the payment of development charges; a field-mounted solar farm does not require a building permit and does not trigger the payment of development charges."

Accordingly, Mono wanted "an immediate amendment to the Development Charges Act so that the provincial approval of any industrial solar farm will support the collection of municipal Development Charges."

The letter said the Large Procurement application registrations in Ontario last summer saw 119 registered potential applicants, 81 of which were proposed solar developments. "Of the 81 solar registrants, only one proposed a rooftop application."

The letter went on to note that Mono "has in place environmentally sensitive planning documents and bylaws to ensure protection of its natural environment. Despite these measures, our stakeholders find that provincial suspension of municipal planning controls over large industrial solar developments nullifies municipal environmental directives developed and perfected over many decades. "The ongoing sacrifice of farm fields as the preferred and cheapest resource for solar development land is not sustainable; installing industrial-sized energy projects on green fields and arable land in Mono is counter-intuitive to the Province's Green initiatives. We believe we can achieve our mutual goals without pitting residents of rural communities against private energy developers and against the provincial government, but we need your help to make the necessary adjustments to policy in order to facilitate this."

Noting that Ontario has "a large and fast-growing resource of flat roofs on commercial, institutional, industrial and warehousing buildings," the letter said wasting the roofs of these buildings (situated mostly on former farmlands) in favour of a competitive procurement system which encourages destruction of fresh farmland, "is not a sustainable practice for Ontario. Toward this end, the Town of Mono has already installed solar on the roofs of our own municipal buildings and we would like to encourage other municipalities to follow our lead."

Calling on the Province to "recalibrate its solar energy strategy from solar farms to solar roofs," the letter said a "better way to incentivize and attract large solar projects in Ontario . . . would be to include a rooftop price adder, providing incentive for solar panels that partner solar developers with commercial and industrial building owners, for rooftop placement of panels."

And the addition of a municipal price adder "would encourage municipalities to partner in large solar procurement projects by investing some of their reserves for a higher earnings ratio than simple interest."

The mayor said the "current very simple concept of accepting bids from developers based on the cheapest price per kilowatt encourages applications for solar development on farmlands, and at the same time disincentives rooftop solar development in Ontario."