

Testimony of Edward Butts

Members of the Board

My name is Edward Butts, I live at 228 N 2nd Street, Geneva, IL 60134. My four sisters and I own the Butts Family Farm on Muirhead Rd in Plato Township, IL. My sisters are Rosalie Ward, Shirley Loar, Phyllis Kelly and Darlene Sherman. They plan to attend the hearing on May 9. I will be out-of-state on that date but will seek to participate through Zoom. However, given the malfunction of Zoom at the initial hearing on April 11, I am taking the precaution of prefiling my direct testimony.

Our farm has a current size of 120 acres, 80 acres with buildings located on the east side of Muirhead Rd. and a 40-acre field located directly across the road on the west side of Muirhead.

We previously owned an additional 110 acres west and south of the 40-acre field, which we sold to the Forest Preserve in 2018. This land remains undeveloped and is farmed by our neighbor Tim Metz Farming under lease with the Forest Preserve.

SV CSG Plato Solar 1, LLC (Sunvest) is proposing to lease approximately 27 acres of our 40-acre field for the construction and operation of a commercial solar energy system. My sisters and I will continue to operate and control the remaining 13 acres of the field which we will either farm directly or lease to Tim Metz Farming or another tenant.

My sisters and I support Sunvest's application for a special use permit to build a community solar energy system on our land.

A Little History

Our father Arthur Butts moved onto this farm on February 28, 1943. At the time, my mother, Rita Butts, was at St. Joseph's Hospital in Elgin giving birth to me. Our father died on the farm 37 years later in 1980. He was combining corn at the time, and my mother was with him.

Our mother died on the farm 37 years after that in 2017. She was 102. During the housing bubble in the early 2000's, she refused to sell the farm to developers no matter how much they offered. While our neighbors were selling their farms for subdivisions, schools or subdividing them into 5-acre lots for future sale as country estates, our mother refused to budge.

My sisters and I grew up on the farm and have spent much of our collective lives there. We share our parents' love for it and continue to work hard to maintain it. We sold the west half of the farm in 2018 to raise money for our respective retirements, but by selling to the Forest Preserve, we preserved the land as open space for future generations to enjoy.

This past February 28, we celebrated our 80th year on the farm. We have set a goal to host a centennial celebration on the farm in 2043. Not all of us will be alive then, but our children and grandchildren will represent us.

Why this solar lease

We began receiving offers from solar companies in January 2022. We didn't sign an agreement until July. During the interim, we did a lot of research and considered many factors. Ultimately, we decided to move forward for several reasons:

- We needed the money,
- We liked the design of the system,
- We liked the positive environmental impacts, and
- We agreed with the solar companies who described this site as an optimum location for a solar facility in our area.

It's about the money.

Our goal is to become an Illinois centennial farm in 2043. We concluded that the extra revenue we would receive from a solar lease was the only way to ensure we would have the financial resources to hold onto the farm for the next 20 years.

When we sold half the farm to the Forest Preserve, we lost 50% of our land rent but reduced our costs by a much lesser amount. Property taxes currently eat up 40% of farm revenue, and those taxes go up every year. Insurance, utilities, maintenance and repair eat up most of the rest. Last year, we lost money because we replaced the roof on our corn crib. We most likely will lose money this year because we need to make repairs to our Morton machine shed, repair a water leak, and make other repairs. It's a lot easier to hold onto a farm if you're taking money out of it than if you are putting money into it.

To be clear, we do not plan to sell the farm if this special use is denied. We still hope to be here in 2043. We are concerned, however, that as my sisters and I start dying off, the survivors are going to come under increasing pressure to sell the farm if we don't have this sustainable source of revenue.

System Design

We rejected an offer from a solar provider 5-6 years ago, in part, because we did not like the design. In that instance, the solar provider was planning to install rows of solar panels running from east to west rather than parallel to the road. The panels were south facing and stationary. The company was not proposing a buffer area of native grasses outside the equipment area, and they planned to build a chain link fence around it. (We particularly objected to the chain link fence because it was out of character with an agricultural setting.)

By contrast, Sunvest is proposing to install rows of solar panels running north and south parallel to Muirhead Rd. The panels will rotate to follow the sun from east to west during the day. In addition to planting pollinator friendly, flowering native grasses within the equipment area, Sunvest is proposing to include a 25-foot buffer area of such grasses around the equipment area. They are proposing to enclose the area with an 8-foot fixed knot fence. A fixed knot fence is a traditional farm fence. It is the same fence we would use to fence in livestock.

I believe, and I think my sisters agree, that an array of symmetrically designed, sun-following solar panels built in a field of flowering, pollinator friendly prairie grasses would not be an unattractive sight. After looking out of our west window for 80 years to see only corn or corn stubble or soybeans or soybean stubble, we think this solar field may offer a refreshing alternative.

Positive environmental impacts

For my sisters and I, a factor in our decision was the positive benefit this solar field will provide for native species. When my older

sister and I were growing up in the late 40s and early 50s, we chased butterflies in the yard, ran from honeybees in the woods, and watched lines of fireflies following the light on our dad's tractor at night. Sunvest's vegetative plantings will promote the return and resurgence of these native species as well as birds and other desirable creatures.

My sister is a life-long gardener and naturalist. She wants to save the Monarch butterfly. The larva of the Monarch only grows and matures in milkweed plants. If you look at the list of plants in Sunvest's presentation, you will see two varieties of milkweed. Without these, I doubt my sister would have signed the agreement.

Why this field?

First, interconnection into the local power company's grid is one of the major expenses of a commercial solar energy system. Interconnection occurs at a power company substation. To be economically viable, the solar system must be as close as possible to the substation. The Butts field meets this criterium because Com Ed's substation is less than a mile and a half south on Muirhead Road.

Second, locating the solar system on our field has minimal impact on other persons or properties. Our farm occupies the entire east side of Muirhead Road across from the proposed solar facility. We are the only folks who will have a direct view of the facility from our house.

The Forest Preserve owns the property on the west side of our field. This is undeveloped land currently being farmed by Tim Metz Farming. Tim also will continue to farm the approximately 8 acres of our field remaining on the west side of the solar facility.

My wife and I own the farm field that borders the proposed site on the southwest, and a bank in Rosemont owns in trust the farm field on the northwest side of the site.

Jason and Kristin Campbell own a five-acre property on Muirhead Road on the north side of the proposed site. Their property is developed with a beautiful home and outbuildings, plus numerous trees and bushes. There is a row of older trees on the property line between our two properties. Because of the vegetation, we do not believe the proposed solar field will be visible from the Campbell's property.

William and Nancy Beaman own a five-acre property on Muirhead Road on the south side of the proposed site. Their property likewise is developed with a beautiful home and outbuildings, including an inground pool. Again, there is a row of older trees on the property line separating their property and ours. We believe this vegetation will substantially block any view of the solar facility from their home and many parts of their yard.

We understood that the Campbells and the Beamans would have misgivings about having a solar field next door, and they certainly have a right to be heard. However, given the design of Sunvest's system, we believe it will blend well into the agricultural environment and will not be a detriment to us or our neighbors.

I also have talked with several of our neighbors who live both north and south of us on Muirhead Road but not adjacent to the proposed site. I have been somewhat surprised that they also have misgivings about Sunvest's proposal. Some have questions for Sunvest at the next hearing, the answers to which may resolve or at least mitigate their concerns.

Others think a solar field will be an eyesore. As previously stated, I disagree. I recently visited Portugal and travelled by bus from the south Atlantic coast to Lisbon. We drove past miles and miles of rolling hills forested with cork trees, olive trees, lime trees and others. Whenever we came upon the south side of a hill that was unforested, there typically would be a field of solar panels on it. I asked a couple of Portuguese on the bus what they thought of them. They thought they looked just fine. I think we will come to view them the same way.

Another neighbor expressed concern that it may hurt her property value. She is planning to sell later this year. Once again, I understand her concern, but I think it is unnecessary. The solar field will exist in a field of flowering prairie grasses, surrounded by a farm fence and bordered by farm crops. At eight feet or less, the solar panels will be similar in height to a corn field in July. The solar field will operate cleanly, quietly, without emissions, without glare and without any artificial lighting. To me, that sounds like the kind of neighbor somebody who is buying in the country would like to have.

One neighbor expressed concern that productive farmland ought not to be taken out of production to build a solar field. I would generally share that view if the reference were to houses rather than a solar field. However, that ship has sailed. We are the only farm left on Muirhead Road between Plank Road and Russell Road that has not been subdivided either for a subdivision or five-acre estates. I have already said why our location is appropriate for a solar field, and I believe that a 5-Megawatt solar system is a higher use of our 27 acres than a corn field.

Finally, I would like to close by pointing out the clear community benefits from the approval of Sunvest's special use application. First, a

solar facility will provide significant incremental tax revenues to support our school system without imposing a single dollar of incremental cost.

Second, a solar facility will not increase traffic on Muirhead Road. Sunvest has stated that once construction is complete, a Sunvest employee will visit the site normally no more than once or twice a month.

Third, the site will not use any water. These two factors--- traffic and water--- are important because the county has identified the lack of road infrastructure and shrinking water supplies as limiting factors for the future development of western Kane County.

This concludes my presentation. I will be happy to answer any questions the Board members or the public may have at the hearing on May 9. I would like to thank the Board for your consideration of my testimony in this matter.

AFFIRMATION

I, Edward Butts, do solemnly swear and affirm that the foregoing testimony was prepared by me and is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Edward A Butts

State of Illinois
County of Kane

Signed and sworn to (or affirmed) before me this 24 day of April, 2023, by Edward Butts.

Kathleen M Coffey
Notary public

