

State gives developers a blank check in site selection

Another Voice / Renewable energy

By Jeff Dewart, Wright Ellis and Jim Simon

Amazon picked Grand Island for a new mega distribution center, which town officials rejected.

Here is what did not happen: The state did not intervene, override local control and make new rules stating the locality had no choice but to welcome the Amazon project.

But that is what New York State is doing regarding large-scale renewable energy projects.

A 2020 state law stripped local control from the site selection process, in effect giving renewable energy developers a blank check regarding site location. From Queens to Grand Island, local control has played a role in Amazon's site selection, but the state has decided that for renewable energy local input is irrelevant. If this seems like a staggeringly incongruous application of land use strategy, you're right.

Local control is a good thing, it allowed Amazon to look to the Town of Hamburg to find a location that wants their development.

Renewable energy projects – any development project – must be planned in communities that want them. It should be simple.

The system is backwards because it allows renewable energy developers to select the development sites. The developer is the most profit-hungry, corporate entity in the renewable energy development lifecycle.

There is also the additional layer of available tax credits fueling profitability. The taxpayers are subsidizing these developments but cannot have a role in

location selection through local control.

New York State should work with municipalities and developers to create a land use matrix – highlighting the best places for new renewable development and where they are most useful and wanted. Not simply where the developer estimates they will maximize profit.

Equating local control to NIMBY (not in my backyard) status is a veiled attempt at discrediting legitimate arguments. A Buffalo News editorial from Dec. 28, 2020, “Towns must use authority over clean energy projects wisely, for everyone’s sake,” oversimplified the issues at hand and misdirected the reader away from what is most important: local control of land use.

Determining whether Grand Island’s rejection of the Amazon project was good or bad for the town is not up to The News’ editorial board. Development of land in a town should never be controlled exclusively by Albany and out-of-town developers.

As town leaders, we will continue to use our authority in the best interests of our constituents, not the best interests of subsidized corporate entities. That, apparently, is somebody else’s job.

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