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LOCAL LAW TO AMEND CHAPTER 108 OF THE RIVERHEAD TOWN CODE ENTITLED 'ZONING'

Good Afternoon. My name is Karen Rivara and I am President of Long Island Farm Bureau. Long Island Farm Bureau is a membership association of 3,900 farmers, fishermen, nurserymen, agribusinessmen and residents interested in preserving a rural quality of life. Our mission is to serve and strengthen agriculture on Long Island.

I am here today to address proposed amendments to Chapter 108 of Riverhead's Town Code dealing with solar energy. Long Island Farm Bureau is opposed to these code amendments as written. These amendments unfairly prohibit farmer's rights throughout the town to utilize farmland that has not yet been preserved for solar power generation. The ability for farmers to capitalize their land is a practice that has existed for centuries. The limits this proposed code places on farmers interested in having solar power on their farms to earn income to offset the high cost of production and low commodity prices could result in the loss of farmland. Losing more farmland to permanent development is very different than allowing a temporary use that could allow the land to revert back to farming. Leasing a portion of their full rights farmland for solar power will allow our local farm families who have been farming this land for generations to have the financial breathing room to transition the farm to the next generation. Having options to remain solvent is crucial to the survival of Long Island's farming community.

In this way, solar production on farmland can act as a preservation tool since the impact on land will be minimal and will result in non-development of the land during the lease period. This will allow Riverhead Town the time and opportunity to find ways to work to preserve and protect farmers and farmland since the PDR Program is currently limited. We feel that Riverhead Town will establish a precedent with this proposed code that will benefit only a few select individuals. These proposed amendments should not be accepted without a thorough vetting process of the stakeholder groups, community residents, and the farming community.

Long Island Farm Bureau policy is supportive of alternative/green energy production including but not limited to wind energy, cellulosic energy, bio-fuels, hydro-electric power, bio diesel and solar power.

It is troubling to the farm community that the process of developing town code that may further restrict the use of our land is taking place at the height of our cultivation season. Several farm operators have expressed interest in solar energy opportunities. In light of that we would like to have the opportunity to work with the town on code that would incorporate the installation of solar panels on farmland. As this matter is time sensitive, we would appreciate starting the discussion with stakeholders and residents to draft reasonable and fair language as soon as possible.

Thank you for your time and attention in this matter.