



Landfills in New York in 2017 | NY Department of Environmental Conservation

# NYSERDA Signs MOUs to Explore Renewable Projects in Closed Landfills

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The New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) on Monday *announced* (<https://www.nysesda.ny.gov/About/Newsroom/2023-Announcements/2023-3-13-NYSERDA-Announces-Agreements-on-Two-Municipally-Owned-Sites>) it had signed memorandums of understanding with Tompkins and Orange counties to study the feasibility of developing renewable energy projects in underutilized landfills.

The installation of large-scale renewable projects has seen community pushback, but the prospect of siting them in an area devoid of people is an opportunity for New York to make progress on its energy and climate goals.

“The town of Dryden is looking forward to participating in the review of this project,” town Supervisor Jason Leifer said in a statement. “Using brownfields for this purpose is preferable to using farmland.”

Both the 112-acre Caswell Road landfill in Tompkins County and the 420-acre Orange County landfill have been closed for several decades. NYSERDA said their transformation into potential renewable energy sites represents progress under the Accelerated Renewable Energy Growth and Community Benefit Act and the agency’s *Build-Ready Program* (<https://www.nysesda.ny.gov/All-Programs/Build-Ready-Program>).

EPA has been encouraging the development of landfill solar and/or storage projects across the U.S. via its *RE-Powering Initiative* (<https://www.epa.gov/re-powering/what-re-powering>), which it estimates has grown by 80% the past five years. A 2021 *report*

(<https://rmi.org/insight/the-future-of-landfills-is-bright/>) from RMI found that the more than 10,000 closed and inactive landfills around the country could host an estimated 63 GW of solar capacity, but only 500 MW had been installed.

Houston recently *proposed* (<https://climatechampions.unfccc.int/houston-landfill-transformed-into-us-largest-urban-solar-farm/>) a plan to change its Sunnyside landfill into a 70-MW solar panel farm, while the Hickory Ridge landfill in Georgia has been covered with a geomembrane anchoring system that has *transformed* (<https://www.hdrinc.com/portfolio/hickory-ridge-landfill>) the site into one of the state's largest solar generators. New Jersey recently *opened* (<https://electrek.co/2022/12/02/largest-landfill-solar-project-in-north-america/>) a 25.6-MW solar farm in the Combe Fill North landfill, which hosts 56,000 solar panels on a brownfield site that had been closed since 1978.

NYSERDA CEO Doreen Harris said in a statement that “these agreements with Tompkins County and Orange County will help us to better understand the viability of these landfills for potentially hosting a large-scale solar project.”

Shawna Black, chairwoman of the Tompkins County Legislature, said that “the potential to generate solar energy from the Caswell Road site is huge,” while Orange County Executive Stefan M. Neuhaus said the “project will help further the county’s energy-efficiency initiatives.”

Anne Reynolds, executive director of Alliance for Clean Energy New York, said “repurposing industrialized lands for the production of pollution-free power is good policy, and we applaud this collaboration with Tompkins and Orange counties.”

Jean Hamerman, executive director of the Center for Land Recycling, said “closed landfills represent an ideal opportunity to reduce our fossil fuel dependence through solar development.”

In an email to *NetZero Insider*, a NYSERDA spokesperson said that the agency is “evaluating both sites for solar PV coupled with battery energy storage systems” and that, through the Build-Ready Program, it will “pursue site control and preconstruction development activities prior to competitively auctioning the developed sites.”

“Future announcements will be made as the Build-Ready Program continues to de-risk the projects and move them towards a competitive auction to private-sector developers to construct and operate,” the spokesperson said.