

Gustin Solar: Who Really Decides?

Consumers Energy proposes a 335 MW solar plant across Gustin & Harrisville Townships, Alcona County. A consultant's letter urges denial. State law may hold the final card. Here is the whole dispute, checked against 27 sources, on two pages.

335 MW

announced capacity

~1,800 ac

project footprint

~60,000

homes served (est.)

94 MW

Harrisville share (AC)

165,321

panels in Harrisville

30 yr

operating term

The 50-megawatt line — a township “no” may not be final

Under Michigan's **Public Act 233** (2023), solar projects of **50 MW or more** fall under the Michigan Public Service Commission unless the township's ordinance qualifies as a “Compatible Renewable Energy Ordinance” — meaning **no stricter than state defaults**. Gustin Solar is nearly double the threshold in Harrisville alone.

PATH A — STAYS LOCAL

Township reviews under a compliant ordinance: approve, deny a non-compliant application, or set conditions — within state limits. Local hearings decide details.

PATH B — GOES TO LANSING

If the township denies a compliant application, takes over 120 days, or enforces stricter-than-state rules, the developer may file at the MPSC — which decides within ~1 year on state standards.

The twist: Harrisville's own rules (45 dBA at 2 a.m.; 150% upfront decommissioning bond) are **stricter than the state's** (55 dBA; 100% phased) — protective on paper, but exactly what could disqualify the ordinance and move the decision to Lansing. The scope of local power is before the Michigan Supreme Court right now (No. 373259).

What a solar farm actually sounds like



Property values: what 1.8M home sales show

Lawrence Berkeley National Lab (2023), 1,500+ projects: homes within 0.5 mi sold for **–1.5%** on average (–3% when the site was former farmland); **no significant effect beyond ~1 mile**. Effects varied by state; lease income and tax revenue to the community are not counted in those figures.



The Grobbel letter: right, wrong, and in between

July 26, 2026: consultant Christopher Grobbel (credentialed, retained by opponents) urges denial on ten findings. Checked against engineering guidance, state law, and independent research:

- 1 **No master plan → zoning invalid** — No plan found anywhere public — but no Michigan court has ever voided zoning over it. Leverage, not a kill shot. **PARTLY**
- 2 **Wetlands not delineated → incomplete** — Hydric soils are real; whether delineation was filed is checkable. The letter itself hedges “on information and belief.” **PARTLY**
- 3 **State wetland permit must come first** — Part 303 permits are routine — and normally run parallel to zoning, not before it. **CONTESTED**
- 4 **Groundwater study required first** — Reasonable ask; but a developer preemption letter is already in the file, and PA 233 caps what townships can demand. **PARTLY**
- 5 **Glare study used wrong panel height** — The letter’s best point: 5.5 ft modeled vs ~9’10” actual. Industry practice says bound min and max. (Modern panels rarely glare regardless — re-run it, expect little drama.) **SUPPORTED**
- 6 **Noise study invalid; like heavy trucks** — 5-ft receptors are standard practice; the truck numbers are at-the-source, not at property lines. Built solar farms generate remarkably few noise complaints. **MISLEADING**
- 7 **Traffic study should be required** — Fair and normal for a build this size; construction traffic is a genuine, temporary impact. **SUPPORTED**
- 8 **Conflicts with future farm uses** — Legitimate zoning standard — though county agriculture is mostly hobby-scale, and land under panels is largely returnable to farming. **PARTLY**
- 9 **Must condition on decommissioning bond** — State law already mandates 100% net-cost assurance, phased 25/50/100% by years 1/5/10. The township’s 150%-upfront rule may exceed what it can lawfully require. **CONTESTED**
- 10 **Must review under Michigan EPA (Part 17)** — True — and routine. It applies to every such decision; listing it inflates the letter’s apparent weight. **MISLEADING**

The best route forward

1. **Verify, don’t assume.** The whole application file is public — read it at the records library.
2. **Demand the checkable fixes.** A glare re-run at true panel height, the wetland delineation, a traffic study — asks that fit inside state limits.
3. **Know what “no” buys.** Denial likely routes the decision to Lansing, where local conditions vanish with the veto.
4. **Negotiate while the file is local.** A host community agreement beats a preemption fight the township may not win.

Show up: Harrisville Twp. Planning Commission — first Wednesday of even-numbered months, 7 p.m.

That room is where conditions get written. Precise questions move boards; imported statistics mostly don’t.

Every public record, mirrored with integrity fingerprints: insidemichigan.org/solar/records

The interactive briefing: insidemichigan.org/solar · Newsletter: The Sunrise Side Dispatch

