Friends of the Land, Bastrop Interfaith oppose Dogwood Creek Solar 313 application to Elgin ISD

Press release, Bastrop Interfaith & Friends of the Land

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Friends of the Land, a Bastrop County farmland preservation coalition, and Bastrop Interfaith are calling on Elgin ISD to reject a Chapter 313 10-year tax abatement for an industrial solar farm on heavily-wooded land near historic Sayersville.

On May 16, the Elgin ISD school board accepted a Chapter 313 tax abatement application from Solar Proponent (aka Dogwood Creek Solar LLC) and also granted them a waiver to an already weak minimum requirement of creating 10 jobs. Solar Proponents is an Austin company, funded by EnCap Investments, an oil and gas hedge fund, that has seven similar projects planned across Texas. The application was not included in the school board meeting agenda for the public to review and comment on. The proposed solar farm will require the clear-cutting of 2,100 acres bisected by Little Sandy Creek, an area prone to flooding and that provides an ever-diminishing refuge for area wildlife.

“After years of wildfires, drought, and rising temperatures, we need to be planting trees, not cutting them down, says Kay Rogers, one of a dozen landowners along Old Sayers Road that are adjacent to the proposed sprawling solar complex. “This firehose of corporate welfare at the expense of taxpayers and—in this case—environmental protection must stop.”

Chapter 313 agreements siphon $1-2 billion from taxpayers statewide as corporate welfare to highly-profitable companies. While the abatement is granted by a school district, the company’s tax break comes out of the state budget. Chapter 313 is expiring at the end of this year after state lawmakers declined to renew it during last year’s legislative session due to opposition from organizations like Bastrop Interfaith (part of Central Texas Interfaith/IAF), allies, and a bi-partisan group of legislators.
“As a former educator, it’s tiring to see tax dollars go to companies making record profits and our school systems struggling to provide the staffing and services our students deserve,” said Edie Clark, a leader with Bastrop Interfaith who helped end the program. “The billions that this program drains from our tax system could go to strengthen our school systems. We support renewables, but not at the expense of established forests, wildlife habitats, and precious tax dollars which could go to schools.”

Solar Proponents joins a long list of corporations, many well-established in the oil and gas industry, that rushed to meet the unofficial deadline of June 1. More than 160 applications have been sent to the Comptroller’s Office for preliminary approval so far this year, nearly three times the average in previous years.

Bastrop Interfaith is a part of Central Texas Interfaith, a non-partisan, multi-ethnic, multi-issue coalition of 50 religious congregations, schools, unions, and civil organizations who work together to address public issues that affect the wellbeing of families and neighborhoods in our community. www.austininterfaith.org