

Protecting Property Rights, Powering Rural Economies

*Firsthand Perspectives on Energy Siting
from Landowners and Local Officials*



Courtney Brady, Charlie Kolean, and Dom Arzon

Executive Summary

As economic uncertainty, rising input costs, and generational turnover continue to reshape agriculture and land use, many rural landowners are seeking practical ways to keep their land generating income. For a growing number, energy generation infrastructure offers a stable, voluntary path forward to help supplement their income while keeping farms and ranches family-owned and operated.

But often, these opportunities are being blocked by outdated siting and permitting rules, effective bans on new projects stemming from misinformation—creating fear and community resistance that takes wind and solar projects that would benefit farmers off the table. These barriers not only limit economic development, but they also restrict the individual rights of property owners to make decisions about their land.

Evergreen Action and the Private Property Rights Institute (PPRI)—two organizations with sharply different ideological roots but shared goals around energy independence, individual freedoms, and rural economic development—partnered to interview rural stakeholders in Michigan and Pennsylvania about their experiences with energy siting on their land and in their communities. This report shares our findings and recommends a path forward.

This report includes case studies of farmers, township officials, and county leaders with firsthand experience navigating these issues. The takeaways were clear: Rural landowners want the freedom to decide what's best for their property, and many are voluntarily choosing to lease their land for energy infrastructure as a way to generate revenue, continue to own their operations, and make ends meet for their families. This economic opportunity requires a siting and permitting system that supports, rather than hinders, that right. The findings are intended to guide local decision makers, legislators, and energy developers as they work to improve permitting processes, respect landowner rights, and expand rural economic opportunity.

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Key Findings

Landowner freedom is a priority.

Rural residents want the right to decide how to use their land, whether that means growing crops, grazing cattle, or leasing for energy infrastructure—or, in many cases, all of the above.

Energy infrastructure leasing is helping family farms survive.

Leasing land for wind, solar, and storage provides stable income that can help cover property taxes, preserve multi-generational farms, and strengthen rural economies. Many farmers see energy projects in the same way they see crops: land tied to revenue and critical resources. Energy leasing provides steady, long-term income alongside traditional farming, with the flexibility to return the land to traditional use after the energy lease ends.

Opposition is often driven by misinformation.

Many landowners and officials cited community resistance fueled by a lack of information and inaccurate claims as opposed to firsthand experience or evidence.

Local officials want better tools.

Township supervisors and county commissioners are asking for clearer guidelines, sample ordinances, and technical assistance to help them make sound permitting decisions within the complex governance systems they navigate today.

Fair siting and permitting processes are crucial.

Establishing consistent, transparent, and legally grounded siting frameworks ensures property rights are respected while effectively addressing genuine community concerns.



A Cross-Ideological Partnership: ***Evergreen Action and the Private Property Rights Institute***

[Evergreen Action](#) is a national policy and advocacy organization focused on advancing an equitable and thriving clean energy future. The [Private Property Rights Institute](#) (PPRI), rooted in conservative principles, is committed to defending private property rights and limiting unnecessary government overreach.

The organizations come to the issue of energy development and generation with starkly different institutional priorities but a shared commitment to energy independence, individual freedoms, and strong local economies. Both organizations recognize that voluntary energy development and land leasing provide rural landowners with a practical way to keep their land, earn a steady income, and plan for the future. But too often, that opportunity is blocked by misinformation, permitting delays, and politically motivated restrictions that undermine landowners' ability to make decisions about their own property.

In this report, Evergreen and PPRI partnered to elevate the voices of rural stakeholders in Michigan and Pennsylvania who are navigating these issues directly. Through a series of interviews with farmers, township officials, and county leaders, the organizations analyzed how local siting and permitting frameworks affect land use decisions and how reforms could better reflect the needs and values of rural communities.

As evidenced in these first-hand stories, protecting landowner freedom and streamlining energy development are not mutually exclusive goals. In fact, they are often in the same vein.

Rural Siting in Context

Adaptation in Rural Economies

Across the country, farmers are navigating shifting economic pressures—from declining crop [commodity prices](#) and [rising operating costs](#) to [labor shortages](#) and increasingly unpredictable weather conditions that are making growing more challenging. In response, many are exploring new, voluntary revenue streams that help keep land in the family and operations profitable.

Leasing land for wind, solar, battery storage, and other energy projects has become a [reliable, drought-proof source of income](#) for rural landowners—helping sustain farms, boost local economies, and support long-term community investment.

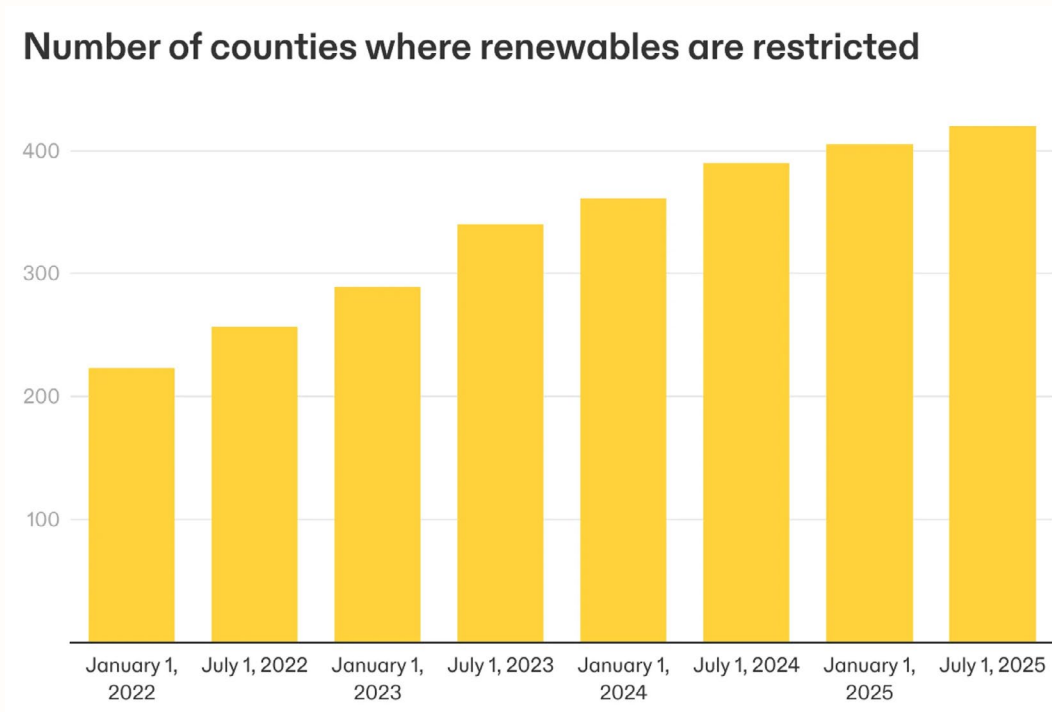
According to the [January 2025](#) Purdue Ag Economy Barometer survey, 11 percent of 400 farmers interviewed said they had discussed solar leases for their land within the previous six months, trending higher over past surveys. Lease rates offered by solar energy companies in 2024 and 2025 were notably higher than in past years, with 40 percent of respondents reporting offers of \$1,250 per acre or more, and 26 percent receiving offers above \$1,500 per acre. For many landowners, this income can [rival or even exceed](#) earnings from traditional crops, providing financial stability amid rising costs and unpredictable yields.

In many cases, landowners [lease underperforming or low-productivity acreage](#) (i.e., land that may not or no longer be well-suited for crop production), ensuring that energy generation complements rather than competes with farming. These leases offer stable, long-term income and create new local tax revenues, benefiting both families and communities. In total, landowners across the U.S. now receive around [\\$2 billion](#) annually in drought-proof lease payments, helping them reinvest in their farms and workforce, pay down debt, and keep land in the family for future generations.

Local Restrictions and Property Rights

But despite these clear advantages, energy projects in rural areas are increasingly being met with resistance. Local bans, restrictive zoning

ordinances, and permitting delays have prevented many projects from moving forward—taking revenue out of the pockets of landowners and communities. According to [reporting](#) by Heatmap News, the number of counties restricting renewable development has nearly doubled since just 2022. As of August 2025, Heatmap tracked 857 renewable energy projects across all 50 states that have faced significant local opposition.



Numbers only account for ordinances that can be time-pegged, and are lower than the total number of counties with restrictive ordinances.

Source: Heatmap Pro

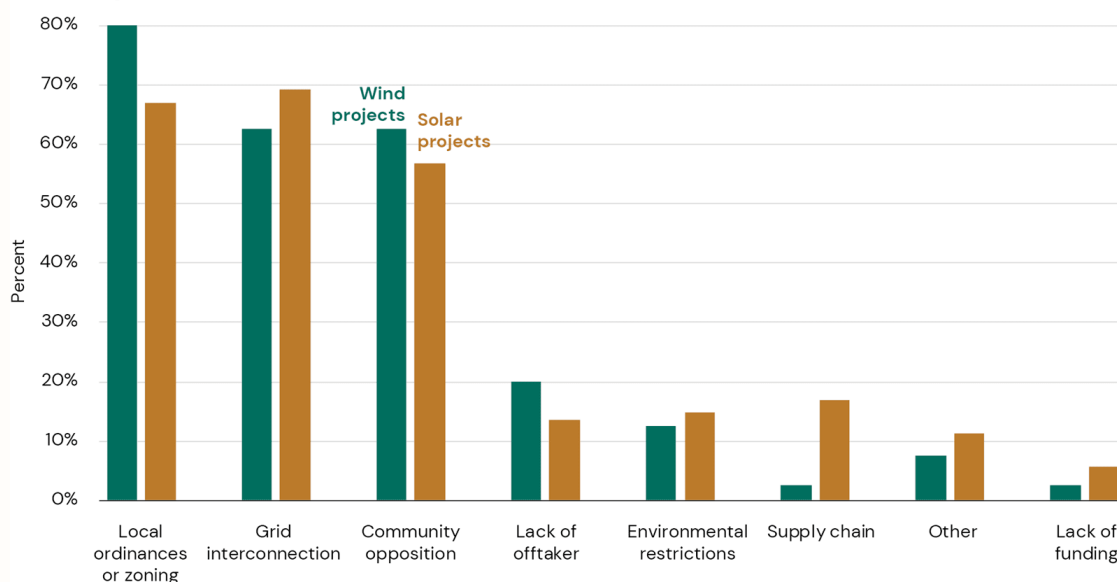
This growing resistance not only threatens the economic potential these projects bring to rural America, but also poses a direct challenge to private property rights. Landowners who wish to lease their land for solar, wind, or battery storage in particular increasingly find themselves blocked by decisions made at the township or county level. In many cases, farmers and rural landowners are being told what they cannot do with their own land, even when proposed projects meet all environmental and safety standards. This undermines a fundamental American principle that individuals should have the freedom to make economic decisions about their property within legal limits.

Siting and permitting challenges remain the leading barrier to project setbacks and cancellations. A [2023 survey](#) (graph below) of utility-scale wind and solar

developers revealed that the top causes of cancellations over the past five years were unduly restrictive local ordinances, grid interconnection delays, and community opposition.

FIGURE A.

Leading causes of cancellation for wind and solar projects, 2016–23



Note: The sample consists of responses from 123 industry professionals from 62 companies, together responsible for about half of wind and solar capacity from 2016 to 2023. There are 88 solar projects and 44 wind projects. Respondents reported the top three reasons that a project was cancelled.

Source: The Hamilton Project and Brookings; Nilson, Hoen, and Rand 2023, p.11

A 2024 [Lawrence Berkeley National Lab](#) survey found that nearly one-third of utility-scale wind and solar projects were canceled and about half faced delays of six months or more. These challenges can cost up to \$200,000 per megawatt, millions in sunk costs, and hundreds of local jobs.

This underscores the need for clear, consistent siting frameworks that protect landowner rights and ensure strong community benefits.

Policy Background: Michigan and Pennsylvania

As renewable energy development accelerates, rural communities find themselves at the center of a growing policy debate. Without clear, consistent, and legally sound siting frameworks, these communities risk missing out on valuable revenue, while landowners face new barriers to using their land—even when projects meet all established standards.

When it comes to governance, states across the country are taking sharply different approaches to siting policy. Some are advancing reforms to streamline project approvals and encourage development, while others are proposing new restrictions that slow or prevent projects from moving forward. Lawmakers are increasingly grappling with how to balance the need for new energy generation with protections for local control and landowner rights. The result is a patchwork of policies that reflect just how politically charged and consequential energy siting has become.

This report highlights first-hand perspectives from two pivotal states—Michigan and Pennsylvania—where active debates over energy siting reflect broader national tensions between economic opportunity, local control, and property rights. Both states are seeing significant wind, solar, and battery investment and serve as key test cases for how rural communities navigate growing demand for new energy sources.

Michigan Policy Overview

In Michigan, [Public Act 233](#) (2023) established a new siting pathway for large wind, solar, and battery projects. Local governments can retain decision-making authority by adopting a [Compatible Renewable Energy Ordinance](#) (CREO) that aligns with state-defined and research-backed criteria for siting considerations such as setbacks and noise. The CREO requirements were created in consultation with a diverse set of stakeholders, including local governments.

This process is designed to ensure local input while reducing unnecessary procedural delays that have historically slowed energy development at the expense of individual landowners seeking to lease their land for revenue. If a local government fails to adopt a CREO or act on a project application

within 120 days, developers may apply directly to the Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC). Local governments receive technical assistance and funding to develop CREOs, and they are compensated when a developer appeals a siting approval to the state level, so they can reasonably represent themselves before the project developer.

In effect, the state has given local governments a strong opportunity to maintain control, provided they adopt a CREO and respond within the required timeframe. While the MPSC pathway offers an important fallback to avoid indefinite delays, the local process is still likely to be faster when those conditions are met. The result is a more predictable and balanced framework—one that respects landowner rights and keeps communities involved without letting permitting get bogged down in red tape.

Pennsylvania Policy Overview

In Pennsylvania, HB 502 would create a [Reliable Energy Siting and Electric Transmission](#) (RESET) Board to help advance and streamline critical energy projects through a statewide siting authority. This would include requirements for environmental and safety standards, as well as input from local authorities. Like in Michigan, it is worth noting that RESET is voluntary in Pennsylvania, meaning project developers can still pursue the local route if they choose.

At the same time, the commonwealth has issued [voluntary solar siting guidelines](#) to encourage collaboration between developers and municipalities and has [launched an effort from its State Energy Office](#) to help educate local authorities on the benefits of renewable siting and address common questions and concerns. These efforts reflect Pennsylvania's recognition that clear and consistent permitting pathways, combined with local engagement, are essential to expanding energy infrastructure while respecting community values. Just as importantly, they help protect private property rights by ensuring that landowners can move forward with energy projects in a timely and reasonable way.

Key Themes from Interviews

Interviews conducted by PPRI revealed a consistent set of themes across geographies and roles. Whether from Michigan or Pennsylvania, or whether speaking as landowners, township supervisors, or county commissioners, local stakeholders voiced similar frustrations and priorities when it comes to energy siting.

Interviewees who identified as Republicans or political conservatives underscored that support for property rights and streamlined permitting is not a partisan issue but a matter of principle and practicality:

Landowners want the freedom to decide what's best for their land.

Interviewees repeatedly emphasized that decisions about land use, particularly for income-generating purposes like energy, should remain in the hands of property owners. Many described the rise of local ordinances or political interference as a direct threat to their autonomy.

Energy infrastructure siting provides critical income during financial uncertainty.

Farmers described energy leases as a lifeline, particularly when crop yields fluctuate or equipment costs rise. Several noted that lease income helped them pay property taxes, maintain buildings, or avoid selling land, especially parcels with low agricultural productivity.

Most opposition is driven by misinformation.

Stakeholders consistently cited fear or lack of information, not evidence, as the source of greatest resistance. Rumors about environmental harm, fire risks, or visual blight often spread faster than facts. This misinformation has, in some cases, shaped local policy and derailed viable projects.

Local officials are working to modernize outdated ordinances.

Several township officials and planning board members acknowledged that their zoning ordinances had not kept pace with energy market trends. They expressed interest in model ordinances, legal guidance, and public engagement strategies to help implement more responsive, future-oriented rules.

There is support among conservative stakeholders for fair, transparent siting.

Across the board, interviewees supported consistent and transparent siting frameworks. They want processes that give the public a voice but that also protect landowners from arbitrary denials or open-ended moratoria. Many said the lack of predictability in the current system discourages investment and undermines local trust.



Case Studies/Interviews

Bob Wackernagel

Farmer, Michigan

Key Takeaways

- Bob leased roughly 100 acres of low-yield farmland to a solar developer, using land that consistently produced poor crops.
- His primary motivation was practical: to generate stable income that helps him pay property taxes and keep the farm in the family.
- He worked cooperatively with developers to minimize community and visual impacts, though he faced some local opposition fueled by misunderstandings.
- He generally supports Michigan's updated state-level permitting framework for providing clarity and consistency in project approvals.

Summary

Bob Wackernagel is a third-generation farmer in Michigan who, at age 60, is the youngest farmer in his area. Several years ago, he decided to lease about 100 acres—approximately one-eighth of his property—for solar development on land that had consistently produced poor crops. He explained, “I use the ground that returns me the least investment back on my crops ... I’ve replanted two or three times a season on that land, because of poor soil quality.” Bob’s motivation is straightforward and practical: managing rising costs and ensuring he can “still pay my property taxes ... and without a crop to pay it, you can’t do it.”

Despite working collaboratively with developers to reduce visual and community impacts, Bob encountered skepticism

from neighbors and township officials. “The people all think we want to just be sellouts. We want to get rich. They act like it’s their land ... They don’t have to pay the property taxes; they don’t have to farm it. The biggest thing is, they act like it’s their land, and they act like it’s their view ... They can’t get over the fact that their view is going to be taken away when it’s not even theirs.”

Bob emphasized the deep-rooted respect farmers like him show to neighbors; however, it does not always seem like that respect is reciprocal: “We try not to spread manure when the wind’s going in their direction ... We don’t let spray drift over into their yard. It’s ridiculous because we respect their property ... I just can’t believe you guys [neighbors] are turning on us like this. We’ve known everybody in this community our whole lives.”

Bob supports processes that allow landowners to more freely lease their land—in line with Michigan’s new legislation—noting the clarity and consistency it provides: “I personally do [want my land permitted] because for me and the amount that I’m doing, I just have absolutely no problem with it.” He sees energy as an adaptive crop, vital for future survival: “You gotta look at it as a crop, too ... Times change, and we have to change or we won’t be here. I won’t be here on this land.”



Dwight Ely

Farmer & Processor, Pennsylvania

Key Takeaways

- Dwight installed a solar array to offset the energy needs of his farm and processing facility, made possible by state and federal incentives.
- The solar project has produced significant cost savings and helped sustain the family farming operation.
- He engaged neighbors proactively to reduce concerns and improve aesthetics.
- He noted it was frustrating that local zoning restrictions block expansions that align with broader energy trends.
- Despite past friction, Dwight values his long-standing relationship with township officials and finds it discouraging when local bureaucrats make permitting unnecessarily difficult.

Summary

Dwight Ely is a seventh-generation farmer in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, where his family has lived and farmed since the early 1800s. In addition to raising livestock, Dwight operates a USDA-inspected slaughterhouse and meat processing business—facilities that carry high energy costs. To cut expenses, he installed a solar array several years ago. The system now powers most of the farm and business and occasionally sends surplus electricity back to the grid.

“Sure, it helped this generation for sure... big savings... absolutely, it helped to continue the generational thing for sure,” he said. “We pay that thing off, and it’s been nothing

but awesome... It’s just been a gift that keeps giving.”

When a few neighbors expressed concerns about the visual impact of the project, Dwight addressed them directly—planting trees, adding fencing, and ensuring the installation fit with the rural landscape.

But when Dwight later sought to expand his solar capacity, his plans were blocked by local zoning restrictions. He voiced frustration that despite strong federal and state support for energy development, local officials still had the power to shut down projects. “When the federal government’s trying to have a program to help encourage people to do something, the state is having a program... what in the world does a township have to stick their toe in the door while you’re trying to close it?”

Though he has a long-standing, positive relationship with his township—“By the grace of God, I have a good relationship with the township now... we’ve been helping our township since we were here”—he warned that others may not be as fortunate.

“Some little guy sitting up at a little office at the township building says... he wants to make it hard. That’s the ridiculous part.”

For Dwight, solar isn’t political; it’s a practical investment in his farm’s future and a tool to preserve his land for the next generation.



Herm Cvetan

Farmer, Pennsylvania

Key Takeaways

- Herm and about 18 neighbors agreed to lease land for a solar project that would provide crucial income.
- The project was blocked by a township ordinance banning solar, driven by misinformation about its visual impact.
- The failed project left Herm and his family facing uncertain decisions about the future of their land.
- Herm emphasizes landowner rights and the need to make legal, informed decisions.



Summary

Herm Cvetan is a third-generation farmer in Lawrence County, Pennsylvania, where his family has worked the same land since 1947. When a solar developer approached him and about 18 to 20 of his neighbors with a proposal to lease their land, Herm saw it as a practical opportunity—one that could help offset rising costs and secure the future of the farm for his children. The additional income would have been a lifeline.

As he put it, “That’ll help keep buildings up and ... taxes and stuff.” For many in the area, the project promised new revenue streams without disrupting their agricultural operations. But despite broad local support among landowners, the project was ultimately blocked when township officials passed a ban on solar development—overriding the wishes of property owners like Herm and cutting off a valuable chance to keep farmland productive and in the family.

Herm described how misinformation shaped opposition, stating, “They thought they were going to see solar panels ... from that corner down over the hill way over there ... And there was not even any ground lease over there.” This ban put Herm and others in a difficult position, facing an uncertain future, and the projects were ultimately blocked. “If we’d have got that in here, that’s the difference of staying here, [and my family is] not trying to leave.”

Ultimately, Herm stressed his belief in landowner rights and the importance of legality: “We got hosed in this deal. I still feel ... as long as it’s my ground, I’ll do what I do with it, as long as it’s legal.”

Jacob Wible

Local Official, Blair Township, Pennsylvania

Key Takeaways

- Jacob's personal zoning experience sparked his interest in local government.
- He strongly supports landowners' rights to lease their land for solar and other legal purposes without excessive interference.
- He views energy sources like solar as an economic and national security benefit.
- Jacob is an advocate for clear, consistent rules that respect property owners while protecting communities.



Summary

Jacob Wible, chair of the board of auditors in Blair Township, Pennsylvania, was inspired to engage in local government after his own challenges navigating zoning to build a shed close to his neighbor's property. He observed the inconsistency in rules across towns: "It's so hard to do something with your own land ... but you go 10 minutes down the road, and you can build a skyscraper and nobody bats an eye."

When discussing solar development, Jacob was unequivocal about property rights: "If a farmer decides he wants to strike a contract with a solar developer for 50 years and have his farm be a solar field—great. That's a private contract, and the government really shouldn't have a whole lot of say in how that works." He also recognized solar's broader value: "The more power that we can make in the United States is better for everybody. It's more energy independence."

Jacob noted solar projects' economic benefits, saying, "You're potentially lowering people's rates, which I think does enormous assistance to people's pocketbooks," and "If it raises the property tax value, then you're raising more money for the community." As a leader, he stresses the importance of updated, clear zoning rules: "If you own it, it's your property. You should pretty much be able to do just about anything you want to do with it—as long as you're not harming your neighbors."

John Zilich

*Township Supervisor: Robinson Township,
Pennsylvania*



Key Takeaways

- John personally experienced the financial benefits of rooftop solar before holding office, which he believes could be extended to more homeowners.
- As township supervisor, he is helping update zoning laws to facilitate solar development.
- He finds that community fears about battery storage are largely driven by misunderstanding and safety concerns. John supports letting projects proceed if they meet clear safety and zoning standards.

Summary

John Zilich, a township supervisor in Robinson Township, Pennsylvania, installed 36 solar panels on his previous home, dramatically lowering his electric bill from about \$400 a month to zero. This firsthand experience with solar's financial benefits informs his approach as an official. He is currently revising zoning ordinances to allow solar "in industrial zones by right and in other zones by conditional use."

While John supports local control over land use, he insists on clear, consistent standards so residents can pursue solar projects with confidence: "We do need to have consistent standards that allow people to move forward." He's encountered some community skepticism, especially from residents resistant to change, but believes municipalities should make the process workable for those who want to participate. "I want my residents to be able to say, 'Hey, I want to do this' ... and do it right," he said. Looking ahead, John encourages other local leaders to stay open to alternative energy options and modernize their ordinances to give landowners a fair path forward: "We're using more energy now than we ever have. It has to come from somewhere. Why not give solar a chance?"

Doug McLinko

County Commissioner, Bradford County, Pennsylvania



Key Takeaways

- Doug defends private property rights as essential to rural prosperity and energy development.
- He supports all forms of energy if done safely, regardless of personal preference.
- Doug emphasizes that misinformation and lack of transparency—not opposition—are the biggest barriers to development.

Summary

Doug McLinko, a longtime county commissioner in Bradford County, Pennsylvania, has overseen the development of more than 1,000 gas wells, hundreds of miles of pipeline, wind farms, and now large-scale solar. A staunch defender of rural landowners, Doug sees leasing for energy development as a vital economic opportunity that must be protected: “Private property rights are the fiber that holds this country together.”

While he personally doesn’t care for solar or wind, Doug fully supports his neighbors’ right to host these projects: “If my neighbor puts [a solar farm] on, I’m not going to be protesting it. That’s his property.” He criticizes zoning regulations that are used to block energy projects outright, warning: “Zoning can be used as a weapon to keep stuff out.”

Doug also highlights the need for better public education and transparency from developers. He’s seen firsthand how confusion, not actual opposition, often fuels resistance. “The problem is there is information ... people don’t know anything about it,” he said. Despite those challenges, Doug remains optimistic about the role energy leasing can play in rural economic development—so long as it respects landowners, public safety, and the right to choose: “There are so many families that are struggling right now ... if they got an opportunity to make money on their property, God bless them.”

Howard Linnabary

Township Supervisor, Leoni Township, Michigan



Key Takeaways

- Howard supports landowners' rights to pursue solar projects when proposals are transparent and well-documented.
- He believes thorough planning and early engagement are essential to gaining community trust.
- Misinformation and lack of clear details often drive fear and opposition, which he believes can be avoided with open communication.
- Howard helped Leoni Township adopt [a solar ordinance](#) to provide clarity and prepare for future development.

Summary

Howard Linnabary brings decades of experience in energy infrastructure to his role as township supervisor in Leoni Township, Michigan. After years of overseeing gas, wind, and solar projects across the country as part of his work at a utility company, he now helps guide responsible development in his own community.

"I'm all for it, if it's presented the right way," Howard said. "If you're truthful, if you're thorough, I'll help you get it done." He emphasized the importance of showing communities what a project will actually look like—through site plans, maps, and drawings—early in the process. "You can't expect people to support something if they don't understand it."

In his view, local pushback often stems not from ideology but from confusion. To provide a clear path forward for both residents and developers, Howard helped Leoni Township pass a solar ordinance well before projects arrived. The ordinance sets clear guidelines for siting residential and large-scale solar projects—including setbacks, screening, and decommissioning requirements. Howard says the ordinance makes it easier to responsibly develop solar by providing a predictable process that respects landowner rights and addresses community concerns up front.

At the heart of his approach is respect for landowner rights and local transparency: "You meet our requirements, you've got a right to do what's best for your land."

Policy Recommendations

To support responsible energy siting in rural communities while respecting local values, landowner rights, and economic opportunity, we recommend the following actions by state leaders, local governments, and developers:

For State Governments

1. Protect Landowner Rights

Pass legislation affirming rural landowners' right to lease their land for energy development—treating it as a permitted land use—so long as projects meet clear health and safety standards.

Avoid one-size-fits-all bans or mandates on new energy infrastructure that limit landowner opportunity and erode private property rights.

Where local siting and permitting processes become unfairly restrictive or overly burdensome, the state should provide a backstop to ensure that individual property owners are not blocked from responsibly developing their land.

2. Provide Technical Assistance and Sample Ordinances

Develop sample siting ordinances and zoning guidance to help local governments adopt clear, legal, and defensible permitting standards.

Offer dedicated support, when feasible, to communities with high development potential through technical assistance from trusted experts.

3. Facilitate Local Learning and Cross-County Collaboration

Evergreen recommends that, to foster trust and informed decision-making, collaborate with farmer-led networks such as the [Renewable Energy Farmers of America](#) (REFA). Encourage opportunities for landowners to hear directly from peers who have hosted energy projects on their farms.

Whenever feasible, support informal gatherings or developer-facilitated meetings that bring together current project hosts, local officials, and landowners—creating a space for questions, shared experiences, and openly shared lessons.

4. Support Local Revenue Through PILTs and Benefit Sharing

Evergreen recommends that state governments ensure that energy projects contribute to host communities by encouraging or requiring [Payments in Lieu of Taxes](#) (PILTs) in Community Benefit Agreements from developers, or other revenue-sharing mechanisms. These payments can help offset any local concerns about tax impacts and provide consistent funding for schools, emergency services, and infrastructure.

State guidance can help standardize PILT expectations across jurisdictions to reduce negotiation conflicts and ensure rural communities receive a fair share of project benefits.

For Local Governments

1. Respect Landowner Choice

Ensure local permitting processes do not unnecessarily block residents from hosting energy projects that meet established safety requirements.

Avoid zoning rules that functionally ban development or deny reasonable economic use of private land.

Local governments should not target specific industries for exclusion—an approach that has disproportionately impacted renewable energy projects. Private property rights must be applied consistently across all lawful land uses, so long as projects meet established safety and zoning standards.

2. Update and Standardize Local Ordinances

Proactively review and revise outdated zoning codes to allow for solar, wind, and battery storage in appropriate zones with clear conditions that make navigation for host landowners and developers straightforward.

Use available sample ordinances to ensure local rules are consistent, enforceable, and grounded in protecting property rights and facilitating economic development.

For Energy Developers

1. Prioritize Transparency and Local Engagement to Combat Misinformation

Provide clear, accurate information about the actual size and footprint of proposed developments early in the process. Avoid showing overly broad land parcels that can cause unnecessary alarm within rural communities.

Work with local officials and community organizations to emphasize which lands will be used—focusing on low-impact areas like low-yielding agricultural land or previously disturbed sites rather than sensitive areas.

Highlight the voluntary nature of landowner participation and the financial benefits per acre, making clear that leasing is a choice that supports farm viability and local economies.

Explain the temporary nature of leases and the ability to revert land to previous uses after project completion, helping communities understand projects won't permanently remove land from productive use.

If you have a project already built in an adjacent community, utilize local stakeholders and landowners from that project to speak to the benefits and process in new localities on your behalf.

2. Promote Community Investment and Local Economic Benefits

Evergreen recommends developers, where feasible, reinvest in host communities through Community Benefit Agreements (CBAs), such as:

- Payments-in-lieu-of-tax payments
- Emergency services support
- Broadband upgrades
- Local infrastructure investments, like road re-pavements
- Farmland Preservation Funds

Emphasize that the primary priority is respecting private property rights and ensuring fair compensation for landowners.

Where possible, prioritize hiring of local contractors and tradespeople with competitive wages whenever possible.

Where possible, invest in training programs that prepare rural workers for energy jobs to build local capacity and strengthen rural economies.

Conclusion

Rural landowners want the same things as most Americans: the freedom to make decisions about their own property, the ability to support their families, and the opportunity to pass on their way of life to future generations. For many, leasing land for energy infrastructure helps make that possible—offering reliable income that sustains family farms, strengthens local economies, and keeps multi-generational farms in the family.

But outdated zoning rules, misinformation, and political interference are blocking landowners from using their property for legal, productive purposes, even when projects meet all required safety and environmental standards. At its core, this is a property rights issue.

By creating clear, transparent siting and permitting processes and honoring local input, state and local leaders can ensure rural communities are treated fairly and have a say in decisions that impact their land and livelihoods, while contributing to American energy prosperity and independence. With the right policies and approaches, energy development can support energy security, preserve family-owned and operated land, and drive long-term rural economic growth.