

**Northampton Agricultural Commission Statement
on “Dual Use” Solar Development on Prime Agricultural Lands
October 27, 2021**

The Northampton Agricultural Commission believes we have the responsibility to protect Northampton’s and the greater Pioneer Valley’s rich and unique farming resources and pass them along to the next generation of farmers.

The Northampton Meadows have some of the richest and most productive agricultural land in all of New England. With over 2,000 acres of prime agricultural soil, the Northampton Meadows have helped feed local residents for centuries and earned our City the nickname the “Meadow City.” Famous for their outstanding fertility, these soils continue to grow potatoes, onions, corn, beets, cabbage, hay, cucumbers, berries, squash, and many other fruits and vegetables.

Recently, municipalities have approved utility-scale solar development on prime agricultural soil under the guise of “dual use,” a corporate branding term that claims one can productively grow food crops under solar panel arrays. Under closer examination, one can see how spurious these claims are.

Solar arrays on agricultural fields greatly limit farmers ability to use standard planting and harvesting equipment. Agricultural fields developed with solar panels receive half the sunlight as undeveloped fields and have far lower yields. In New England’s increasingly wet climate, crops grown under solar panels would be far less resilient to flooding, and suffer far greater fungal blights and insect damage. Organic farmers, in particular, have far fewer methods at their disposal to mitigate these threats to their crops.

The Commonwealth is considering incentivizing utility-scale solar development on prime agricultural soils by allowing landowners to continue to use Chapter 61A tax breaks, even though solar arrays drastically limit what type of farming can be done underneath.

We believe these incentives to develop farmland go against the original intent of Chapter 61A, and we do not support the proposed language to extend Chapter 61A to dual use solar as currently included in these regulations.

While the Northampton Agricultural Commission recognizes the critical need for renewable energy, we do not agree that we must sacrifice our best agricultural land to meet our energy goals. We are not opposed to solar development on marginal or sub-prime agricultural soils.

While we are relieved that Northampton's zoning bylaws currently restrict the development of prime agricultural soils, we are concerned that there will be growing legal pressures to challenge Northampton's agricultural zoning.

Preserving our prime agricultural soils is critical to the long-term survival of our local farm economy and food security. We must protect our best agricultural lands so that the next generation of farmers can provide us with safe, secure food in the future.



About the Agricultural Commission of the City of Northampton, Massachusetts

The Commission is a member of the Massachusetts Association of Agriculture Commissions and the Massachusetts Farm Bureau. The Commission:

- Facilitates the pursuit of agriculture in Northampton
- Promotes agriculture-based economic opportunities in the city
- Mediates, advocates, educates, and / or negotiates on farming issues
- Advocates for preservation of prime agricultural lands
- Researches initiatives appropriate to creating a sustainable agricultural community
- Coordinates the license of city agriculture land

<https://northamptonma.gov/196/Agricultural-Commission>

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