

Dear rural neighbors and local officials:

### **Six Townships of Solar Sprawl**

The corporation Earthrise, funded by a global equity firm, is proposing a 600 MW commercial solar project that will consume 5400 acres of farmland with over 1.5 million solar panels. Earthrise has targeted Will County's largest remaining farming district, located in the fertile watersheds of Prairie Creek and Forked Creek, which is Will County's largest stream system. For two years, without notice to our local officials, Earthrise has solicited solar land leases in six Will County Townships, including Florence, Green Garden, Manhattan, Peotone, Wesley and Wilton. Earthrise has not yet filed its zoning application nor provided a site plan with identifiable parcel numbers. Based upon available public records, we have generated maps to expose the magnitude of this proposed solar sprawl. Please note that these maps remain incomplete, as not all Earthrise leases are filed and most parcels with narrow transmission easements have been excluded.

### **Map One - 7900 Acres of Farmland**

In Map One, parcels in red highlight 7900 acres of farmland with Earthrise solar leases in Will County's bucolic farming district nestled between iconic Illinois Route 66 and Interstate 57. This enormous sprawl reaches from Green Garden Township, which is just south of the Village of Frankfort, all the way south to Wesley Township, situated along the banks of the Kankakee River. Because many parcels with Earthrise solar leases are owned by land investors, thousands of these acres, currently planted and harvested by local farmers, will be taken out of production for decades, adversely impacting the livelihoods of our farming community.

### **Map Two - Mega Solar by Design Wilton Township**

Map Two shows Earthrise solar leases scattered throughout Wilton Township, totaling almost 2770 acres. These proposed solar sites are the result of two new laws. First, a 2023 Illinois State solar law eliminated our traditional zoning rights and the protections found in our comprehensive land use plans. Also in 2023, Will County revised its own solar ordinance. Generally, a special use involves one property or several properties that are "contiguous" and connected. This allows for a meaningful, case-by-case review of concerns by adjacent neighbors. However, Will County now allows solar developers to include farmland that is "contiguous or noncontiguous" (Will County Ordinance 155-9.245 (A)(1)). The ability to heap multiple, disconnected properties into one mega site and one special use case is why Earthrise is here. It is by Will County's own design. Having a Planning & Zoning Commission hearing impacting thousands of acres and hundreds of adjacent landowners is a mockery of the zoning process. We will be pursuing litigation strategies that challenge the 2023 state and county solar laws, as well as address the 2025 USDA federal mandate prohibiting solar panels on prime farmland.

### **Map Three - Rural Destabilization Green Garden Township**

Map Three shows the invasion of Earthrise solar sites four miles into the interior of Green Garden Township, totaling almost 1770 acres. Over the past fifty years, farmland in Green Garden Township has transitioned into dozens of rural subdivisions and hundreds of estates and farmettes. However, new November 2025 Illinois solar legislation will require not only 20' H solar panels but also the fire-prone, utility-scale solar storage batteries to be set back only 50' from rural backyards. Every cornfield in unincorporated Will County is vulnerable to becoming a toxic sea of glass and metal. As a result, custom home construction, the bread-and-butter of Green Garden Township's rural-residential growth, will end, with an inevitable conversion of real estate into a commercial and industrial zone. The real impact of mega-solar projects like Earthrise is destabilization of a rural community. Our historic farming district will not survive Earthrise's massive solar site. However, we can choose to take a new path forward, to sustain our farming district through agri-tourism and to define our own boundaries through home rule incorporation. Our next update will explore these possibilities.

We much appreciate your kind messages and support.

Sincerely,  
Thomas Becker  
Chairman  
The Watershed Committee  
Green Garden Township