Formed Texaco Site Still on Market

Cleanup continues at 153-acre property near Beacon
By Jeff Simms

Glenham Mills, the sprawling former campus of the Texaco Research Center, remains for sale, more than three years after its owner, Chevron, began seeking offers.

As in 2020, when the company first advertised it, there is no price tag attached to the parcel. Dutchess County tax records assess the campus, which abuts Beacon’s northeast boundary, at $3.47 million.

The 153-acre property, in the shadow of Fishkill Ridge, was the research center headquarters for nearly 70 years, until it closed in 2003.

“We continue to market the site to local and regional developers,” said Charles Fontenot, a Chevron representative, on Wednesday (Aug. 30). Fontenot said the company, which merged with Texaco in 2003, has had talks with developers but would not disclose details.

The site is located in the Town of Fishkill on its border with Beacon. In a newsletter to residents in July, Fishkill officials (Continued on Page 18)

Hudson Hil’s to Close

Popular cafe was mainstay in Cold Spring
By Michael Turton

The owners of Hudson Hill’s Market and Cafe announced on Tuesday (Aug. 29) that they plan to close the popular Cold Spring breakfast and lunch spot this weekend after a 13-year run.

“Hudson Hill’s Cafe wants to thank our community for all the amazing years of love,” Hilary and Bob Hayes posted on Facebook. “We have been blessed to be part of Cold Spring’s bustling Main Street, watching your kids grow and Philipstown blossom. It is bittersweet to announce that our last day of service will be this Sunday, Sept. 3. We will miss the friendly smiles and warmth of the village.”

“We just needed to simplify our life a little bit right now, and concentrate on our family,” Hilary Hayes added on Wednesday. “We’re looking forward to the next chapter.”

Hayes said she and her husband have not decided whether to sell the building, which has two upstairs apartments. (Continued on Page 5)
Solar Energy (from Page 1)
much of the heavy lifting as New York State moves to mitigate climate change by replacing power derived from fossil fuels with solar, hydropower and wind. But individuals and local municipalities, businesses and organizations are also embracing the transition. After declining in 2017 and remaining stable through 2020, solar installations in New York have been rising again and more people are buying rather than leasing.

Local installs
Highlands residents are using government incentives to install solar systems at their homes and businesses, essentially turning them into power plants, and federal incentives under the Inflation Reduction Act will provide tax credits of up to 30 percent of installation costs through 2032.

At the same time, residents without the money or space for systems, including apartment complex owners such as the Beacon Housing Authority, are buying energy generated by small solar farms. Philipstown officials are exploring the suitability of placing panels on its former landfill on Lane Gate Road and other town-owned properties, and Beacon is planning to supplement its solar installation at Dennings Point with an array atop the Highway Department garage on Camp Beacon Road.

A drive to reduce greenhouse gas emissions is a motivator, but so is cost. The price of electricity generated by natural gas rises and sometimes spikes, as it did locally in February 2022. Meanwhile, the cost of solar continues to fall.

Shipments of solar panels to the U.S. reached a record high in 2022, according to the federal Energy Information Administration, which noted this month that the costs of panels have dropped significantly since 2010.

“...”This is something that we all have to do, and it’s something that we can do,” said Thomas Wright, a Beacon resident who installed an 8-kilowatt system on his roof. “We can set our personal energy policy at home.”

Most families and organizations are embracing power derived from fossil fuels with moves to mitigate climate change by replacing power derived from fossil fuels with solar, hydropower and wind. But individuals and local municipalities, businesses and organizations are also embracing the transition. After declining in 2017 and remaining stable through 2020, solar installations in New York have been rising again and more people are buying rather than leasing.

They have said they were looking for adventure and for a switch in parenting roles. In August 2020, amid the pandemic shutdown, the Hayes put the 1860s building on the market for $1.65 million. Hilary Hayes had been commuting to Wall Street as an equity analyst while Bob Hayes, a classically trained chef, was a stay-at-home dad.

Solar Incentives

Tax credits
- New York offers a tax credit of up to $5,000 to residents who have:
  - Purchased solar energy system equipment;
  - Signed an agreement to lease a system;
  - Entered into an agreement that spans at least 10 years for the purchase of solar power generated by a company.

More information is available at nysberda.ny.gov.

- The federal government offers a solar investment tax credit that allows homeowners and businesses to claim 30 percent of the installation costs. In some circumstances, people who buy interests in community-solar farms can also claim the credit. Find out more at energy.gov/eere/solar.

Tax exemption
- New York offers residences and businesses a 15-year property-tax exemption on any increase in value due to the installation of solar systems.

Low-cost financing
- New York offers low-cost financing to residents who do not qualify for traditional loans and to business owners.
  - Residential On-Bill Recovery loans are repaid as a line item on monthly utility bills. If a resident sells their home, the unpaid balance is transferred to the new homeowner.
  - Smart Energy loans are repaid directly to a loan servicer.
  - The Renewable Energy Tax Credit Bridge Loan is a short-term loan that allows homeowners to finance federal and state tax credits.
  - Businesses and nonprofits can apply for on-bill loans of up to $50,000 to finance solar systems. The repayment period is 10 years.
  - The state partners with lenders to provide small businesses with loans of up to $100,000 at below-market interest rates.

Find out more at nysberda.ny.gov.

Big goals
Renewable energy sources generated or saved 95 million megawatts of energy between 2020 and 2022, the state Public Service Commission reported in July after a briefing on the implementation of the state’s Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA).

Hudson Hils (from Page 1)
“...it’s been a great run, and it was a really tough decision to close,” she said. “We’re super thankful for everyone in the community; it’s been awesome, we’ve loved it.”

The couple opened the restaurant at 129-131 Main St. in 2010. Hilary Hayes had been commuting to Wall Street as an equity analyst while Bob Hayes, a classically trained chef, was a stay-at-home dad.
Solar Energy (from Page 5)
production by 2040. As of July, the state had contracted with more than 150 renewable-energy and transmission projects that, if all are completed, will deliver 66 percent of the state’s energy, according to the PSC.

The price of solar has dropped dramatically in recent years, making it more affordable for homeowners. The average price of a solar panel in New York state is now less than $2 per watt, a significant decrease from the $3 per watt that was common just a few years ago. This has made solar energy a viable option for many homeowners who are looking to reduce their carbon footprint and save money on their utility bills.

One of the key incentive programs for residents, businesses, nonprofits, schools and other organizations is NY-SUN, which former Gov. Andrew Cuomo’s administration launched in 2012 with a goal of seeing 4 gigawatts of solar installed by 2020. Today, the state has reached 6 gigawatts, with 7.1 cents per kilowatt-hour as the average price for solar energy, making it a cost-effective alternative to traditional energy sources.

The average home in New York state can save $1,000 to $2,000 per year on their electricity bill by installing solar panels. This is a significant amount of money that can be saved over the lifetime of a solar system, which typically lasts 25 to 30 years. In addition to the savings on utility bills, solar energy also reduces greenhouse gas emissions, which can help combat climate change.

The trend now is to purchase systems outright. The average system installed by Empire Solar Solutions, based in Newburgh, generates 11 kilowatts and costs about $35,000, but federal and state incentives (see Page 5) cut that price in half, said Mark Zurla, one of the company’s founders. While the average cost that Empire’s customers pay for solar, about 12 cents per kilowatt-hour, has not changed since it began selling systems in 2015, prices for electricity generated by fossil fuels have gone up and tend to fluctuate, said Zurla. Over the last 12 months, Central Hudson’s standard rate for electricity has ranged from a high of 17.3 cents per kilowatt-hour in November 2022 to 11 cents in July, and has averaged 11.8 cents for the past year, according to company data. Electricity prices averaged 7 cents in 2018, and peaked at 11 cents in February of that year.

The savings on electricity supply costs, coupled with credits for supplying excess power to the electrical grid (called “net metering”) and the incentives combine to create an average payback period (when savings exceed the system’s price tag) of five years, said Zurla.

“If the system is designed properly you’re not buying anything from the utility,” he said. “Nothing.”

Next week: Community Solar

Support our nonprofit. Become a member!
PART 2

The Sun Rises on Solar

Residents, officials embrace community approach

By Leonard Sparks

A free energy supply, provided by the sun, is a prize out of reach for many businesses and property owners. They may have north-facing roofs, which tilt away from the sun’s southern arc in the Northern Hemisphere; inadequate space for ground-mounted arrays; or simply cannot afford a solar-power system, even with generous incentives.

One alternative is community solar, in which individuals, businesses and organizations “subscribe” to the energy produced by privately funded solar farms and receive renewable-energy credits on their electricity bills. In New York, the mandated discount is 10 percent.

Several hundred households, businesses and most of Putnam County’s libraries have joined a community-solar program, said Joe Montouri, the executive director of Sustainable Putnam. “It’s a great deal. It costs nothing to sign up and there’s no penalties for quitting, although I don’t know why anybody would quit.”

Utility-scale solar projects — generally over 10 megawatts — are expected to do much of the heavy lifting as New York State moves to mitigate climate change by replacing power derived from fossil fuels with solar, hydropower and wind. But individuals, municipalities and organizations are also embracing the transition.

After declining in 2017 and remaining stable through 2020, solar installations in New York have been rising.

There are at least eight firms that provide community solar in the Hudson Valley. Sustainable Putnam partners with a firm called PowerMarket, which serves

(Continued on Page 16)

Study: Haldane Plan Would Raise Taxes 10.5 Percent

School board considering details of $35.7 million capital project

By Joey Asher

To move ahead with the first phase of a $35.7 million plan to upgrade and expand the Haldane campus, district residents would have to approve a tax increase of 10.5 percent, according to a study shared with the school board at its meeting on Tuesday (Sept. 5).

That amounts to about $1,100 in new taxes for a Philipstown home valued at $600,000, according to an analysis done by Capital Markets Associates, a consulting firm hired by the district.

If the board decides to go ahead with the project, a referendum on whether to borrow the money to finance it would likely be included on the ballot in May with the annual budget and trustee vote.

Phase I of the master plan includes a range of projects, including a new wing at the high school that would include a student center, science and tech lab, and classroom. Combined with an addition for an existing

(Continued on Page 5)

Beacon Could Rezone Fishkill Avenue Corridor

Healey dealerships depart, and changes expected

By Jeff Simms

With four substantial parcels on Fishkill Avenue (Route 52) owned by Healey Brothers auto dealerships on the market, the Beacon City Council says it will consider rezoning a portion of the corridor to spur mixed-use development that could include affordable housing.

The council discussed the first draft of a rezoning proposal during its workshop on Tuesday (Sept. 5). A public hearing would be required before any council vote.

There are a number of elements at play in the corridor, which hugs Fishkill Creek as it wends from Beacon toward Hopewell Junction. The first is the four Healey properties. The largest, with a 20,000-square-foot retail building, is listed for $3.2 million. A second, with a 10,200-square-foot showroom, is $1.8 million, and two additional lots, each with buildings, are listed for $1.45 million and $450,000.

The Healey business was approaching its 40th year in Beacon; Bill Healey, the father of the brothers, owned a Chevy dealership in Goshen when he purchased Shaw
**Local Officials**
This is a list of elected and appointed officials at the local, state and federal level and how to contact them with your praise or protests.

**Local Government Video Guide**
OK, it’s not Netflix, but here’s a list of sites where you can watch videos of local and county public meetings.

**How They Voted (Congress)**
Summaries of consequential and newsworthy legislation in the U.S. House and how Rep. Mike Lawler (Philpstown) and Rep. Pat Ryan (Beacon) voted. Updated weekly when Congress meets.

**Storm Updates and Resources**
Storm watcher resources and contacts for when the power goes out.

**Community Calendar**
This is the full Monty — we only have room for the highlights in print.

**Community Directory**
This is a continually updated guide to local businesses and cultural sites, with addresses, phone numbers and web links.

**Shop Local Online**
We created this during the pandemic; it's a list of local retailers that allow you to order online.

**Real-Estate Data**
These graphs are created on-the-fly by a firm called Dataherald and include the number of new listings in Putnam and Dutchess counties, the number of home sales and median home sale price.

**Job Search**
Provided by Indeed, these are continually updated listings for open positions in the Highlands and surrounding areas.

**Back Issues**
This is an archive of our past issues, in PDF format, from June 2012 to date, except for the latest issue, which is emailed to Current members on Friday morning.

**Podcast Archives**
Here are links to all the episodes of our podcast, for easy listening. The three most popular downloads so far have been interviews with a barefoot Ironman competitor; Dinky Romilly of Philipstown, who discussed her civil war rights work and her famous mother; and the author of a book about stone walls.

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**What’s Online at HighlandsCurrent.org**
These resources can be accessed through the pulldown menu on the top of each page, under “Resources” and “Reader Guide.”

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**Electrified**
Gas becomes passé for Beacon resident

By Leonard Sparks

When Thomas Wright and his business partner, Joseph Fretesi, began feeling a heightened sense of urgency three years ago because of the mounting evidence of climate-change’s impact, and decided to go beyond the heat pumps. In addition to replacing on-demand hot-water heaters and the gas-powered heaters in the 10,000-square-foot space where Atlas makes furniture, they subscribed to a community-solar project based in Kingston. At his home, Wright decided, as part of the addition of a second story in 2021, to replace the gas boiler and radiators with air-source pumps that heat and cool. In December, an induction range replaced the gas oven and he installed an electric hot-water heater. (There is also no gas in the garage; his family owns two electric Kias: an EV6 and a Niro.)

In March 2022, Wright had solar panels installed on the home, taking advantage of a hefty federal tax credit included in the Inflation Reduction Act. He tracks their production with a phone app and estimates the system will pay for itself in about eight years.

“Right now, it’s a great time because there’s been a lot of clear days,” he said earlier this summer. “Almost every day, we’re producing a lot more than we’re using.”

Eventually, we hope to take that 30 percent that we’re covering with community solar and renewable-energy credits and get close to 100 percent of local production by putting solar panels on other facilities that the city has.

~ Chris White,
Beacon city administrator

As companies continue to build farms, the state is considering amending the rules for community solar to allow for opt-out agreements between municipalities and developers. Residents and businesses would automatically be enrolled but could choose to receive electricity from their utility company or a third party.

Beacon is among a coalition of communities supporting the change, said Chris White, the city administrator. The City Council declined to rejoin a community-choice aggregation program under which Cold Spring, Nelsonville and Phillipstown are receiving electricity at a fixed rate.

Under Community Choice Aggregation (CCA), the fixed rate can sometimes be higher than the one charged by a utility company, whose prices for energy fluctuate throughout the year. “Sometimes you win, sometimes you lose,” said White. “We wanted to go to a guaranteed-savings model. That’s what community solar does.”

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**Solar Energy** (from Page 1)

eastern Putnam County and has solar farms in Brewster and North Salem. The Beacon Housing Authority just signed on with Nexamp to support a farm in Greene County.

Founded in 2007, Nexamp has installed arrays of ground-mounted panels in 10 states. Eight of the company’s 40 projects in New York are in Central Hudson’s territory, including a 2.6-megawatt farm off Route 9D in Wappinger. A typical farm produces 5 to 6 megawatts of power per day, enough energy for 1,000 homes, said Keith Hevenor, Nexamp’s communications manager.

“The reality is that so many people can’t do rooftop solar for a number of reasons — the roof faces the wrong direction; the roof is too old and would have to be replaced before they could do panels; they are a renter in an apartment or they’re leasing a house and they don’t own their rooftop,” he said.

A decade ago, the Beacon Housing Authority won a $1.5 million federal grant that was combined with state and Dutchess County funds to pay for $2.5 million in energy-efficiency projects, said Roland Traudt, the authority’s executive director.

Part of the money funded the installation of rooftop solar heaters that fill some of the hot-water needs at Forestall Heights’ high-rise building and at Hamilton Fish Plaza on Eliza Street.

Traudt said the agency explored leasing a rooftop system for electricity but its board did not like the idea of committing to a 20-year deal. Then, along came community solar.

With the authority’s 245 apartments supporting solar and energy efficiency, “that makes a difference,” said Veronica Schetter, the agency’s assistant director. Although the savings are important, “the bigger issue is being better to the environment,” she said.

**Thomas Wright checks the ductwork of the pumps that heat and cool his Beacon home.**

Photo by L. Sparks
nity solar and renewable-energy credits and get close to 100 percent of local production by putting solar panels on other facilities that the city has," White said.

Philipstown is also eying local production. The town is planning to install panels atop its new Highway Department garage on Fishkill Road, but is also envisioning a solar array at its former landfill on Lane Gate Road.

In March, officials from Philipstown and the Environmental Protection Agency toured the property to assess its suitability as a solar farm. Despite concerns about the steepness of its slopes and its orientation toward the south and east, an assessment concluded that 3.5 acres at the landfill are viable for solar panels generating 875 kilowatts annually.

Martha Upton, Philipstown’s climate smart coordinator, told the Town Board at its Aug. 3 meeting that because the acreage is small, the town should look to combine the landfill with other town-owned parcels. Sustainable Putnam identified a few town properties that could be viable for solar, she said.

They include 10 acres at the New Leaf Restoration town farm, across Route 403 from the Desmond-Fish Public Library; the parking area at the town park, which may be suitable for a solar canopy; and land behind the Highway Department building.

The landfill alone would be “a good start,” but additional properties “would give us a more substantial project and greater potential benefits,” Upton said.

Jason Angell, a member of the Town Board, said the traditional arrangement is for a developer to lease property from a municipality for the installation of an array whose power they sell, but the Inflation Reduction Act, enacted by President Joe Biden last year, has made it easier for municipalities and nonprofits to own solar farms.

“That’s where it could be fairly lucrative to the town because you own the electricity,” said Angell, who is co-founder of the Ecological Citizen’s Project, which is helping Peekskill develop a community-owned solar project.

The Town Board will discuss options for community solar at a workshop on Wednesday (Sept. 13) at 7:30 p.m.

In Putnam, solar panels that power the county’s Kern Building in Brewster, which houses the Motor-Vehicle and Health departments, went online in July 2021. Additional panels have been installed on four county buildings in Carmel.

Montouri said he has also suggested to Putnam legislators that the county identify cleared lands, both public and private, where solar farms can be erected, and that the county’s Climate Smart Community Task Force promote community solar.

“It would be good for our local grid if there’s more renewable energy locally so that we’re not dependent on so much power coming from upstate New York or Quebec, where a lot of our hydro comes from and will in the future,” he said.

How to Join
Community solar providers are required to register with the state Department of Public Service, which has a search tool online at bit.ly/ny-solar-map.

There are seven companies that work with Central Hudson, which serves the Highlands; one firm, SunCommon, has farms in Rhinebeck and Red Hook but both are closed to new subscribers. The others are listed below.

Note: Central Hudson uses a “dual billing” system, meaning you will receive one bill from the utility and another from the solar provider that reflects a 10 percent discount.

• Ampion (ampion.net)
• Clearway (clearwaycommunitysolar.com/new-york)
• Common Energy (commonenergy.us)
• Nexamp (nexamp.com)
• Solar Generation (solargeneration.net/community-solar)
• Solstice (solstice.us)

For Part 1 of this series, which focused on home installations, see highlandscurrent.org.