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by [Michael Puttre](#) on Wednesday 18 June 2014

In June 2011, a deadly tornado ripped through central Massachusetts, carving a path of destruction through Springfield and towns to the East. In Brimfield, the storm made a ruin of facilities owned by the Springfield Boys & Girls Club.

Soltas Holdings, the solar power development business owned by GameChange Racking CEO Andrew Worden, acquired the 300 acres and **repurposed** them for a 6.25 MW solar project.

"A local contact introduced us to the boys club, and we bought the land," Worden says. "After the tornado damage, the road-front land was just really trashed, and the land was a really good value."

The land consisted of three parcels fronted by main road, of which two were suitable for solar arrays. The third parcel consisted mainly of wetlands and was left undeveloped. The usable parcels sloped up to a plateau. However, the land was quite rocky - typical for New England - and thus unsuitable for a post-driven ground-mount system.

For this reason, Worden says his team elected to use GameChanger's Pour-In-Place ballasted ground-mount system. Combined, the two arrays consist of 5,500 seven-foot Styrofoam leave-behind forms. Supports placed in each form support the rails, which, in turn, support 23,000 Canadian Solar panels. Concrete poured into the forms provides the ballast and ground support. Inverters are Solectria XT transformerless units.

"Interconnect was actually really easy because the tornado took all the original wires down," Worden says. "National Grid had gone in there and put in brand new wires that had much more capacity."

The project, which has recently been sold, has a number of off-takers, including the Greater Lowell Vocational Technical High School, in Tyngsborough. The project was one of the last to qualify under Massachusetts' original solar renewable energy certificate (SREC) program. The commonwealth has since launched a revised **SREC II** program.

Worden says the solar project has turned a local disaster into a benefit for Brimfield, which had been receiving only a couple of thousand dollars a year in taxes from the land when it was owned by a nonprofit organization.

"All of a sudden, we're paying \$87,000 in taxes a year," Worden says. "It's like the town getting one-and-a-half policemen."