

PRESENT: C. Bragg, Chairman
R. Harris, Vice Chairman
L. Howdysshell
R. Thomas
B. Schindler

J. Hensley, Planner II
E. Goodloe, Planner I
D. Wolfe, Director of Community Development

ABSENT: K. Leonard

VIRGINIA: At the Called Meeting of the Augusta County Planning Commission held on Tuesday, October 10, 2023 at 3:30 p.m. in the Board of Supervisors Conference Room, Augusta County Government Center, Verona, Virginia.

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The Planning Commission reviewed the request to renew the North River Agricultural and Forestal District and reviewed the substantial accord request for New Leaf Energy, Inc. and traveled to the following site, which will be considered at the Public Hearing:

Wayne Ave Solar 2, LLC
TMP 084 101C
Wayne Ave
Stuarts Draft, South River Magisterial District

Staff briefly went over the information the Planning Commission asked staff to gather on the twelve (12) Solar Policies in the Comprehensive Plan, and stated that they would be going over the research during November's Staff Briefing for the Planning Commission.

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Chairman

Secretary

PRESENT: C. Bragg, Chairman
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J. Hensley, Planner II
E. Goodloe, Planner I
D. Wolfe, Director of Community Development

ABSENT: K. Leonard

VIRGINIA: At the Regular Meeting of the Augusta County Planning Commission held on Tuesday, October 10, 2023 at 7:00 p.m. in the Board Room, Augusta County Government Center, Verona, Virginia.

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DETERMINATION OF A QUORUM

Mrs. Carolyn Bragg stated that there was a quorum. She stated that one member was missing, Kyle Leonard. Ms. Bragg also stated that they were short one member from the Pastures district, and that the position had not been filled yet.

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MINUTES

Mr. Larry Howdyshell moved to approve the minutes of the called and regular meeting held on September 12, 2023.

Mr. Randy Harris seconded the motion, which carried unanimously, 5-0.

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PUBLIC HEARINGS

Mrs. Bragg stated that they had one public hearing for the evening.

Ms. Julia Hensley introduced the item on the agenda as a substantial accord determination for New Leaf Energy Inc. requesting to construct a small solar energy system. The name of this application is Wayne Ave Solar 2.

Ms. Hensley reviewed the process for a small solar energy system application, stating that the location, character, and extent of this proposed project has been reviewed by staff and various agency partners. Based on that review, staff have generated the staff report within the agenda packet, which outlines staff's assessment of the request's compliance with the Augusta County Comprehensive Plan. The Planning Commission will make a substantial accord determination pursuant to Virginia State Code Section 15.2-2232. The purpose of this determination is to identify if the proposed project is in compliance with the Augusta County Comprehensive Plan.

The Planning Commission's determination of the project is a recommendation to the Board of Zoning Appeals. If the Planning Commission determines the project to not be in substantial accord with the Augusta County Comprehensive Plan, the applicant has the opportunity to appeal the decision within ten (10) days to the Board of Supervisors or to move forward with the request to the Board of Zoning Appeals. If the request to appeal is submitted to the Board of Supervisors, the Board has sixty (60) days to hold a public hearing on this request. If this project is scheduled for a public hearing before the Board of Supervisors, the current sign will remain on the property, public notice will be published in the Staunton News Leader, and the project will be posted on the Meetings and Agendas page of the County website. Regardless of the substantial accord determination, the Board of Zoning Appeals has the authority to grant or deny Special Use Permits for small solar energy systems, and to assign pre-conditions and operating conditions to the Permit. When the project is scheduled for a public hearing before the Board of Zoning Appeals, adjacent property owners will receive a letter, a new sign will be posted on the property, and public notice will be published in the Staunton News Leader.

Ms. Hensley stated that the request was for a substantial accord determination pursuant to Virginia State Code Section 15.2-2232 for the New Leaf Energy Special Use Permit request to construct and operate a small solar energy system (3 megawatts) on property owned by Ellen B. Fitzgerald and Laura B. Fitzgerald (TMP 084 101C) located within the field to the north of the house at 147 Wayne Ave, south of the railroad that parallels Wayne Ave. in Stuarts Draft in the South River Magisterial District. The project is on an approximately 36.5-acre parcel, and the proposed acreage to be developed within the fenced area is approximately 23 acres with approximately **6 acres** of the fenced area under the panels, approximately **9 acres** for stormwater controls and the access road, and approximately **2 acres** for landscaping. This request is located within an Urban Service Area of the Comprehensive Plan, planned for Industrial.

Ms. Hensley displayed the following visuals: an aerial map showing the property included in the request outlined in red; a zoning map of the property indicating that the parcel is currently zoned General Agriculture; the Future Land Use Map of the property showing that, according to the Augusta County Comprehensive Plan, the parcels in question were planned for Industrial; the map of the Planning Policy Areas for the

property showing that the parcels are located within the Urban Service Area of the Comprehensive Plan; and the site plan from the applicant.

Ms. Hensley asked the Commission if they had any questions regarding the request before the applicant came up to speak.

The Commissioners did not have any questions.

Mrs. Bragg invited the applicant to the podium to present the request.

Ms. Jessie Robinson introduced herself as a project developer with New Leaf Energy Inc. (New Leaf), and introduced Quentin Wood as the project engineer.

Ms. Robinson gave a brief background of the company, stating that they were initially known as Borrego Solar founded in 1980. In 2022, the development arm of the company split from Borrego and rebranded as New Leaf Energy. She explained that they have worked across the country developing solar systems in California, Illinois, New York, Massachusetts, and in Virginia.

Ms. Robinson explained that the Virginia Clean Economy Act was passed in 2020, calling for Dominion Energy to procure about 1,000 megawatts (MWs) of solar by 2035. She said that there are also a lot of different types of solar projects that exist, such as rooftop solar and utility-scale solar, and that she was under the impression that the County had seen utility-scale a few years ago. She explained that utility-scale solar connects to the grid via transmission lines, and tends to be a couple of hundred acres or more.

The proposed project by New Leaf is considered small-scale solar and would be part of the shared solar program, which is capped at 200 MWs. Most of the 200 MWs are already subscribed, leaving only a select number of projects still eligible to enroll in the program. Ms. Robinson stated she believes this project would be admitted into the program. The program allows people who receive electric service through Dominion Energy to subscribe to a project and get savings on their electric bill, about 15%. It is a condition of this project that New Leaf would give County residents the opportunity to subscribe before seeking customers elsewhere.

Ms. Robinson showed the Commission examples of two projects they have completed with a fixed tilt and single axis tracking system.

Ms. Robinson explained the location of the request. She stated that it was south of Stuarts Draft, off of Wayne Ave behind the existing railroad, to the east of Hollister Incorporated, an Augusta Water wastewater treatment plant, and adjacent to a previously approved project. She detailed the reasons why New Leaf had chosen the site. First, there was interest on behalf of the landowner, the Fitzgerald family. The Fitzgeralds see this project as a good use for the site, as the parcel has restricted opportunities for other types of development because its access is limited by a double track railway.

There is necessary infrastructure for interconnection located at the site; such as three-phase distribution lines. Additionally, the site is located in Dominion territory, which allows them to participate in the shared solar program. The site is within a zone that allows them to apply for a Special Use Permit in general ag zone. The project would not impact wetlands or floodplains at this site. It's approximately 800 feet from Wayne Avenue.

Mr. Quentin Wood stated that the project would include twenty-three (23) acres within the fence, and approximately nine (9) acres would be allocated to the access road and stormwater management facilities, two (2) acres for landscaping within the twenty-three (23) fenced acres, with six (6) acres of panel coverage. Mr. Wood showed an illustration of the project next to the approved project, which he said would begin construction in the fourth quarter of 2023. He explained that both projects are twelve (12) acres under panel cumulatively.

Mr. Wood explained how they felt the project satisfied each of the twelve policies of the Comprehensive Plan. In regards to the Economy policy, he stated that this project would create around 30 to 40 temporary jobs and around two to four permanent, long-term jobs. These jobs would vary from operation maintenance to landscaping. Using current tax rates, this project is estimated to generate approximately \$27,000 over the 40-year lifespan of the project. The project would bring in additional taxes of around \$191,000, and they would also be offering a voluntary, one-time payment of \$50,000. Mr. Wood indicated this project would not eliminate any jobs. There is currently a tenant farmer who will continue to farm the remaining acreage of the property. He explained that this project would also increase the resiliency for the local grid, and could bring in more industrial projects.

Mr. Wood then explained the second policy of the Comprehensive Plan, which focuses on rural viewsheds. He displayed a photograph of the site. On the right was a view from Wayne Avenue with the railroad grade in front along with the landscape buffer, behind which the solar facility would sit. He indicated the facility would not detract from the view of the Blue Ridge Mountains. He also explained that they would be blending the landscape to ensure a uniform landscape screening with the adjacent solar projects. In addition to the landscaping buffer, New Leaf also proposed lower panel height of around 11 feet as opposed to the 15-foot maximum height detailed in the County's ordinance. He stated that with both the Wayne Avenue I and Wayne Avenue II projects, the fenced acreage is less than 50 acres, which is below the large solar energy system definition within the County's ordinance. He stated that staff did find that the project would not affect the rural viewshed from the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Mr. Wood explained that Policy 3 focuses on the agricultural landscape and economy, and said that the landowner would continue to farm the remaining land. He also detailed the proposed condition of sheep grazing within the fenced area. At the end of the lifespan of the project the landowner will have the opportunity to reevaluate what he wants to do with the property. Staff had stated in their report that this particular parcel is planned for industrial use in the Future Land Use Map.

Policy 4 focuses on prime farmland, and staff reported that the majority of panels that are proposed to be sited on this property would not be located on prime farmland. As an operating condition in the staff report, all the topsoil would remain onsite.

The fifth policy is about visual impact. Mr. Wood proposed a landscape buffer with a berm along the northern and western side of the project, which would be approximately 20 feet in depth and would shield the Schneider Park. Mr. Wood presented photo simulations. The first photo depicted the view from Schneider Park with one-year landscaping growth. Mr. Wood then showed stimulations of five-year growth and 10-year growth. Mr. Wood stated that the landscaping growth would not take away from the view of the Blue Ridge Mountains in the background and the tops of Lane Orchard. The next photo simulation was from the viewpoint of Wayne Ave., and showed the previously approved site and the growth from year 10. Again, Mr. Wood stated that you could still see the Blue Ridge Mountains in the background.

Ms. Robinson quoted from the staff report regarding Policy 6 (balanced land uses) and Policy 7 (compact, interconnected development), “while this project is being cited directly adjacent to an approved solar facility in an urban service area, both facilities would be less than 50 acres under panel. Staff feel that the location for the two facilities would not change the character of the community as industrial is planned for these two parcels.”

Ms. Robinson mentioned that by having this project here, it wouldn't affect the capacity of what already exists in terms of water resources, and stated that she was aware that the County had put money into water and sewer infrastructure in the general area. This project would reserve capacity for future development on a better-suited site. The project would take up about 0.39 % of the urban service area or 0.0039. She indicated that one aspect that made this site a good fit was that access is limited. She explained that the landowner has tried to pursue industrial development in the past, and was unsuccessful in both instances due to the limited access caused by the double track railway. She then explained that railroad companies have requirements on safety and how much traffic can cross the tracks in a day, and many industrial uses would exceed that capacity.

Ms. Robinson stated that the Fitzgeralds do not have an opportunity to use this parcel for much else. With the parcel being slated for future industrial use, she explained that a solar project with a max height of 15-feet can be well screened. An industrial building that could be several stories would be more difficult to screen and could impact the view of neighbors. Having solar at this site would not deter development on adjacent properties for industrial use. She also stated that in the past, the Planning Commission had approved solar projects in the Urban Service Area when circumstances were appropriate.

Ms. Robinson explained Policies 8 (open space) and 9 (interconnectivity). She indicated the two policies encourage outdoor recreation in the County and connecting spaces together to allow people easier access to the spaces. She also stated that this project has reserved a 40-foot corridor that could be used for the greenway that the County has

as a conceptual plan through this parcel. The greenway could locate between the landscape buffer and the railway. She proposed that a solar project would not impede the trail, and explained that the landowners are happy to work with the County on helping the greenway come to fruition if the solar project were to be approved.

Ms. Robinson explained the resource considerations (Policy 10) and the natural resource benefits (Policy 11), stating that the project is not impacting any wetlands or floodplains. She explained that New Leaf lowered the proposed height of the panels after receiving feedback. They are also using the topography to their advantage to help reduce visibility of the site. She reiterated what Mr. Wood had mentioned about keeping the topsoil on site.

Ms. Robinson then discussed Policy 12, clustering and co-location. She indicated that the staff report noted that although this project would be adjacent to an approved solar facility, staff does not feel this would constitute as clustering due to the sites locating on contiguous parcels and utilizing homogenous design. Ms. Robinson then explained that the acreage under panel is six acres. When considering the previously approved project, the total fenced acreage would be below 50 acres and therefore would be considered a small energy system according to the County's ordinance.

Ms. Robinson indicated that staff also commented in their report that due to the parcel's limitations for future industrial development and the similar footprint of the approved adjacent solar facility, siting two separate yet adjacent facilities would be appropriate in this case. Ms. Robinson said that in this case, staff considered the application on a project-by-project basis and again mentioned the limited access to the parcel. Staff also found that because the two projects are homogenous in design, the two facilities locating adjacent to each other would not have undue impact on future development in the area or alter existing community character.

Ms. Robinson stated that they had mentioned they were planning to do sheep grazing on site. She then introduced Mr. Daniel Dotterer, an expert in solar farm sheep grazing. Mr. Dotterer introduced himself. He explained that his family had been farming for over 300 continuous years, and currently farm sheep.

Mr. Dotterer stated that a group of farmers started the American Solar Grazing Association (ASGA) approximately five years ago. Having witnessed former agricultural land being used for solar projects, the ASGA envisioned production agriculture, in particular sheep farming, supplementing solar facilities. Part of Mr. Dotterer's responsibility on the Board of Directors of ASGA is working with state and federal governments.

Mr. Dotterer explained that a number of European countries, such as France and Spain, have mandated keeping agricultural land used for solar facilities in active production. This subject is a topic of discussion between the ASGA and federal entities. He indicated that a significant amount of the approximately five million acres of land in the United States slated to be used for solar energy production was previously agricultural.

Mr. Dotterer stated that there are a lot of questions about agriculture, including: how popular is solar grazing? Is this a new practice, or has it been around for a long time? Is this real agriculture? Why would you want sheep on solar? What happens to these sites after not producing crops for 25, 30, or 40 years?

Ms. Robinson mentioned some of the benefits of small scale solar. She noted that the County would see additional taxes, and estimated an additional \$200,000 over the life of the project. She also mentioned the additional voluntary payment New Leaf proposed to make before beginning construction. Ms. Robinson explained that this project would allow the landowner to maintain ownership of the parcel since farming the land has not enabled them to afford all bills. Ms. Robinson stated that New Leaf would make upgrades to the distribution in order to interconnect their project. Anyone along the circuit could potentially benefit from the upgrades. Ms. Robinson explained that this project could be included in the shared solar program and New Leaf conditioned that County residents would be given the first option to enroll. She explained that the subscriber would need to be a Dominion Energy customer, and could have approximately 15% savings on their bill.

Ms. Robinson stated that New Leaf conducted community outreach. They had a virtual meeting in March 2023, and a meeting in person at Schneider Park in August 2023. Based on feedback received at these meetings, New Leaf adjusted portions of the design such as lowering the panel height. Ms. Robinson reiterated that this project would be a beneficial use of a site that is difficult to develop otherwise, given the difficult access across the road. The project would allow the landowner to exercise property rights to develop the property in accordance with the ordinance as he sees fit, and would provide them supplemental income. Ms. Robinson stated that she hoped New Leaf had demonstrated that the project is in compliance with the Comprehensive Plan.

Mrs. Bragg asked the Commission if they had any questions. Seeing none, Mrs. Bragg opened the public hearing, stating that they had several people signed up to speak.

Mr. Phil Martin of 209 Raintree Rd., Verona, VA 24482, the Executive Director of Augusta Water, spoke. He stated that Augusta Water did not support or oppose this project, but their Board had asked him to offer comments at the hearing. He reiterated what he has said in past meetings that Augusta Water works with the County to achieve their development objectives in a fiscally responsible manner. This is achieved by working within the framework of the Comprehensive Plan. The project is in an Urban Service Area with industrial listed as the planned future use. Mr. Martin explained that with in accordance with their mission, and in compliance with the Comprehensive Plan, water and sewer would be available if it was extended to this property. There is currently a six-inch main that is on the adjoining property approximately 1,300 feet to the east, which would need to be extended if development occurred as envisioned in the Comprehensive Plan. He also explained that there is also a 24-inch sewer main located on the adjacent property, approximately 1,300 feet to the east. Sewer is treated at the nearby Stuart Wastewater Treatment Plant. The plant currently has four million gallons per day (GPD) capacity, and is currently treating about one and a quarter million

GPD. There is adequate capacity at the plant. Mr. Martin indicated that the Comprehensive Plan gives direction to Augusta Water in regards to utilities. It informs whether they should develop and invest in water supply sources and wastewater treatment capacity. The Comprehensive Plan also helps Augusta Water prioritize the location of any future water and sewer extensions based on which Planning Areas development is occurring in.

Mr. Martin also explained that rate payers fund any water/sewer extension projects in the Urban Service Areas. They have analyzed the potential financial impact to their rate payers. He explained that if the parcel was developed as envisioned in the Comprehensive Plan, Augusta Water projected approximately \$750,000 in revenue over the 35-year span of the proposed solar project. He explained that this estimation was developed using a four-inch water service line, which he said is the average line size for an industrial user.

Ms. Joy Loving of 9448 E Timber Ridge Rd., Grottoes, VA 24441 spoke in favor of the project. She spoke on behalf of herself and also on behalf of two non-profit organizations, Shenandoah Valley Faith and Climate (SVFC) and the Climate Action Alliance of the Valley (CAAV). They wanted to voice their support for the Wayne Avenue II solar project in Stuarts Draft. She explained that SVFC encourages area congregations and faith communities to take appropriate actions to be good stewards of God's creation. She stated that they believe it is necessary to find ways to make the benefits of solar energy possible for more homeowners and renters, especially those who cannot afford installation costs themselves and residences that are not suitable for solar from a site perspective. She expressed that the organizations think it is vital to have distributed solar as part of the transition toward less fossil fuel energy and more renewable energy. Ms. Loving explained that CAAV has studied large-scale solar, and that this project was not a large-scale project. She stated that the project being small-scale is a benefit, and that SVFC echoes the support of the CAAV for the project. She thought it was an excellent candidate for shared solar, and a model that Augusta County could use to point to its contribution in regards to renewable energy.

Mr. David Fitzgerald of 147 Wayne Ave, Stuarts Draft, VA 24477 is one of the landowners of the parcel being considered for the project. He stated that they liked the idea of working with sheep to graze under the solar panels, which would utilize the barns that currently exist on the property. There would be 60 acres of land after the construction of the project to devote to agricultural uses. He stated that he has been farming for 50 years, and they have been harvesting the sun for soybeans, corn, and wheat. He indicated the solar array would allow the sun to be harvested for electricity and the neighbors would benefit from the savings on their Dominion bills. He explained that people do not like solar in their backyard but that the solar would be 20 feet from his kitchen window. Mr. Fitzgerald also explained that the project would allow his family to continue farming in the future, and it is their retirement plan.

Mr. Skyler Zunk of 210 E Franklin St., Richmond VA 23219 spoke on behalf of Energy Right, a non-profit organization. The organization is dedicated to educating rural

communities and the public about clean energy to develop the right way. The organization believes clean energy can be positive for rural Virginians when executed properly. He said he had attended the community meeting at Schneider Park, and listened to the concerns of the citizens. Mr. Zunk stated that this project uniquely encompassed an agriculture use with solar grazing, and would allow the landowner to profit from his land by harvesting the sun in a new way. He explained that the Comprehensive Plan talks a lot about property rights as long as the use is not adversely affecting the neighbors. He said it sounded like the landowner had considered other uses in the past. He thought that the landowner knew best in this scenario and had sufficiently satisfied concerns of neighbors or other nearby landowners.

Ms. Rebecca Glass of 1806 West Midland Trl., Lexington, VA 24450 spoke in favor of the project.

Ms. Janet Rawlings of 615 Elk Mountain Rd., Afton, VA 22920 spoke against the project. She stated that this was in an Urban Service Area which went against the Comprehensive Plan. She said a previously approved project should not be used as precedent. She did not think this was the right location for solar.

Ms. Jean Dorr of 75 Sylvan Dr., Stuarts Draft, VA 24477 spoke about the concerns and questions she had for the project, including: the decommissioning of land, the decrease in the values of her home, and the health risks of the electromagnetic sensitivity associated with living near solar facilities.

Mr. Stan Sikorski of 169 Benz Rd., Waynesboro, VA 22980 made a general rebuttal to all solar projects and talked about the future of the development for the County.

Ms. Ann Terrell of 49 Sylvan Dr., Stuarts Draft, VA 24477 spoke in opposition of the project. She said it would take years for the landscaping to grow. Concerning the Comprehensive Plan, she stated that this was clustering. She expressed to not make the first approval a precedent by approving this project, and that the project goes against the Comprehensive Plan.

Ms. Rebecca Angelo of 26 E High St., Stuarts Draft, VA 24477 spoke against the project. She stated she lived up the hill from the proposed Wayne Avenue II facility. She stated it conflicts with the Comprehensive Plan, as it constitutes as clustering. She stated she is not opposed to the Fitzgerald farm having solar panels, but she is concerned with what solar will do to the Valley and to the County. She questioned why the solar developers were not considering siting on large buildings, like Target Distribution and Amazon. She also questioned where we would put the panels after 20 or 30 years since we cannot put them in a landfill. She asked if there is bonding by the solar companies.

Ms. Tammy Anderson of 21 Princess Lane, Stuarts Draft, VA 24477 spoke against the project. She asked where the additional powerlines and substations the power generated would be going to.

Mrs. Bragg asked if anyone else wanted to speak for or against the proposed project. Seeing none, Mrs. Bragg closed the public hearing.

Mrs. Bragg asked if the applicant would like to speak again.

Mr. Dotterer spoke again addressing the agricultural aspects of the project and concerns about the sheep grazing and the supply of sheep. Mr. Dotterer addressed the soil concerns, stating that they are in year three (3) of a long-term study. The study is being done by Penn State, Cornell, Princeton, and Rutgers where soil samples are taken before a solar site is built, and again at 15-year intervals. He explained that having vegetation on the mature pasture will increase organic matter on solar sites. He stated that after the solar site is removed, the land will be supercharged.

Ms. Robinson addressed the question about interconnection stating that they are connecting directly to the distribution line at the site. Underneath the ground, adjacent to the access road is MV trenching electrical cabling that connects the solar project to the point of interconnection with the distribution circuit. Energy generated will go to the existing Stuarts Draft substation; and no additional infrastructure will be needed. She explained that for some utility scale projects, a new substation is often needed that is specifically for that project. She stated that their attorney was present and he could confirm that for them.

Ms. Robinson stated that if this project were to be found in substantial accordance with the Comprehensive Plan, it would not set a precedent for adjacent sites. She indicated that staff interpreted the plan, as does New Leaf, that clustering applies to large-scale projects being located next to each other. She explained that this project is small-scale. Even if considered with the adjacent project, both projects are under 50 acres.

Ms. Robinson stated that the items about how the site is designed would be addressed as a SUP issue with the BZA. She reminded everyone that the decision that night was related to the comp plan only for this specific project. Ms. Robinson concluded that staff found the project in accordance with the Comprehensive Plan and they believe they demonstrated that as well.

Mrs. Bragg asked if the Commissioners had any additional questions for the applicant?

Mrs. Bragg stated she had a couple. The first one was about the sheep. The second question was concerning the first project, asking if turned out to not be a shared use program? She also asked the applicant what their experience was on the 15% savings as part of the community shared program?

Ms. Robinson stated its about the minimum bill, which is part of the legislation. She stated people do have outstanding questions about the minimum bill and how that would affect calculations. The shared solar legislation contains language that a certain amount of savings that customers should receive is approximately 15%. Ms. Robinson

explained that this was the first time the program is being done in Virginia. A lot of people are subscribing now during the construction period.

Mr. Dotterer addressed the question concerning sheep and why there is a lack of supply.

Mr. Howdyshell made a comment concerning a statement made about solar on rooftops and that not all rooftops are structurally made to handle solar.

Mrs. Bragg asked the Commissioners if they would like to discuss.

Mr. William Schindler stated that given both sides of the issue and the fact that the Commission had an absent member with extensive knowledge who would be able to assist in discussion, he made a motion to table the request so that the Commission could give it strong and serious consideration to the presentation and comments made during the public hearing.

Mr. Harris seconded the motion, which carried unanimously, 5-0.

Mrs. Bragg stated that they were going to table the request until next meeting. She stated the public hearing was closed so there would be no public comment at the next meeting. She said this would give the commissioners time to reflect on comments from both sides. She explained that if they had questions that come up they can address and get further information.

Ms. Hensley introduced the next item on the agenda as a request to renew the North River Agricultural and Forestal District. The proposed district encompasses approximately 4,500 acres of land, generally lies south of Reeves Road (Route 766), east of North River Road (Route 730), west of Spring Hill Road (Route 613) and north of Moffett Branch Road (Route 739) in the North River District. Any landowner may withdraw their land from the district at the owner's discretion by filing a written notice with the Board of Supervisors at any time before the Board of Supervisors acts on the request. All interested parties are invited to be present. There are currently 3,622.94 acres confirmed in the district and 616 acres have not contacted staff back.

Ms. Hensley asked if there were questions or comments from the Commission regarding this request.

Mr. Howdyshell stated that this was something the Board of Supervisors handled, and that they looked over it and did not think they had any comments about what they are doing.

Mr. Howdyshell made the motion to recommend, which carried unanimously, 5-0.

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STAFF REPORTS

Ms. Hensley introduced the first staff report as an update for the Comprehensive Plan and Economic Strategic Plan. She stated that the first post-kickoff monthly meeting with the consultant, Hill Studio, would be held Friday, October 13th. She stated they had a number of items on the agenda. They will review findings from the visioning sessions, discuss focus groups and potential participants for the focus groups.

Ms. Hensley also stated that on Friday they will be having a branding and logo meeting. The purpose of the meeting is to have an initial brainstorming session with the graphic design consultant at a staff level, which will then be incorporated with future community input. She informed the Commission that staff have finalized the dates for all of the community information sessions, and that they will be happening in November. The first is scheduled for November 1 at Clymore Elementary. The second will be on November 9 at Riverheads Elementary School. The third will be on November 15 at Stuarts Draft Elementary School, and the fourth will be on November 16 at Churchville Elementary School. The last in-person meeting will take place on the 27th of November at Wilson Elementary School. Staff are finalizing the date and time for a virtual session.

Ms. Hensley stated that staff is hoping to launch the community survey on Friday. The questions have been finalized. Staff have developed a Comprehensive Plan webpage that is going to house all information relating to the plan in an effort to keep the community up to date. The website will tentatively launch Friday. She explained that there are currently one-on-one interviews being conducted for the Economic Development Strategic Plan. There are also several focus groups that have been combined, including agriculture, that are related to both Economic Development and the Comprehensive Plan.

Ms. Goodloe reviewed the agenda items with the Commissioners for the November 2023 Board of Zoning Appeals meeting.

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There being no further business to discuss, Mr. Howdyshell made a motion to adjourn.

Mr. Harris seconded the motion, which carried unanimously. 5-0.

Chairman

Secretary