

Solar Work Session Meeting, Wednesday, March 10, 2021, 3:30 p.m., Government Center, Verona, VA.

PRESENT: Gerald W. Garber, Chairman
 G.L. "Butch" Wells, Vice-Chairman
 Pam Carter
 Michael L. Shull
 Scott Seaton
 Jeff Slaven
 Steve Morelli
 Timmy Fitzgerald, County Administrator
 Jennifer M. Whetzel, Deputy County Administrator
 Leslie Tate, Senior Planner
 James Benkahla, County Attorney

VIRGINIA: At a Special Work Session Meeting of the Augusta County Board of Supervisors held on Wednesday, March 10, 2021, at 3:30 p.m., at the Government Center, Verona, Virginia, and in the 245th year of the Commonwealth....

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Leslie Tate, Senior Planner, discussed the project size ranges. Small projects, per the County's ordinance, is anything less than 50 acres, medium in acreage from 150 to less than 400 and large in acreage is over 500 to over 1000. There are six items that require Board consideration:

1. Should utility scale (medium and large) solar facilities be prohibited in urban service areas and should small-scale facilities also be prohibited in urban service areas?
2. Should utility scale solar facilities be prohibited in community development areas?
3. Could the Board support a maximum size of less than 500 acres under photovoltaic panel?
4. Could the Board support a maximum size of 500-1000 acres under photovoltaic panel?
5. Could the Board support a clustering consideration of no more than one maximum acreage (ex: 300 acres) within a one mile radius? Does the Board support this for small-scale solar facilities as well?
6. Could the Board support limiting the location of projects to within a two mile buffer of existing transmission/distribution lines?

Ms. Tate stated that in response to 2020 state legislation, Dominion Energy alone has committed to 16 gigawatts of solar which is roughly 16,000 MW or 160,000 acres of solar energy facilities, over the next 15 years. Augusta County represents roughly 2.27% of the total land area of Virginia. In theory, if Dominion's goal alone were to be achieved proportionally in terms of locality land area, Augusta County would need 3,632 acres of solar energy facilities by 2035 (roughly 0.5% of all County land area).

The benefits of Small solar energy facilities include:

1. Allow for stronger synergies between agriculture and farmland, as landowners can lease part of their land to a solar developer and retain the remainder of their property to continue agricultural operations.
2. Allow individual financial benefits to be realized by multiple landowners who can have small projects, as opposed to just a few.
3. Small-scale projects are able to be more evenly dispersed throughout the entire County.

The benefits of large solar energy facilities include:

1. Useful in helping achieve state mandated renewable energy goals at a more rapid pace.
2. Countywide financial benefits are much greater due to higher taxation and revenue share.

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3. Photovoltaic panels are concentrated all in one area rather than having multiple smaller projects in any one community.

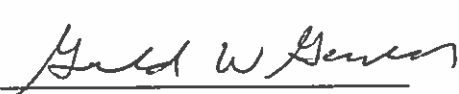
Ms. Tate discussed the example draft languages for the Comprehensive Plan and the County ordinance. A House Bill provides a step down in the mandatory exemption (80% for the first five years of operation, 70% for the next five years, and 60% beyond).

The energy tax option may provide more revenue than the currently 80% mandated exemption, but that depends on the size of the project and specific local tax rates. A revenue share assessment replaces the M&T tax. Any locality may, by ordinance, assess a revenue share of up to \$1,400.00 per megawatt, as measured in alternating current generation capacity of the nameplate capacity of the facility based on submissions by the facility owner to the interconnecting utility, on any solar photovoltaic (electric energy) project. This does not apply to projects that are 5MW or less.

Ms. Tate used the Maroon Solar application in Culpepper County as an example. Waynesboro Solar is now under staff review. It is a proposed 40-acre solar energy facility on a 90-acre parcel at the northwest quadrant of Entry School Road and Old White Bridge Road in Waynesboro.

The Board discussed in length their concerns and determined that a follow-up worksession would be needed to further discuss.

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Chairman


County Administrator

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