

PRESENT: Greg Campbell, Chairman
L. Howdyshell, Vice Chairman
C. Bragg
K. Shiflett
R. Thomas
J. Wilkinson, Director of Community Development
L. Tate, Senior Planner
C. Stoerker, Planner I

ABSENT: T. Jennings

VIRGINIA: At the Called Meeting of the Augusta County Planning Commission held on Tuesday, January 12 at 3:00 p.m. in the Board Room, Augusta County Government Center, Verona, Virginia.

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Ms. Tate discussed the items on the agenda for the upcoming BZA meeting.

The Planning Commission reviewed the following rezoning request and traveled to the following sites, which will be considered at the Public Hearing.

Leslie L. and Karen A. Bell (TMP 046 82) located on the north side of Woodrow Wilson Parkway (Rt. 262) approximately 0.5 miles southeast of the intersection of Woodrow Wilson Parkway (Rt. 262) and Lee Highway (U.S. Rt. 11) in Verona in the Beverley Manor District.

Waynesboro Nurseries, Inc. (TMP 085A (2) 7, 9, 10) located in the triangular land created by Lyndhurst Station Road (Rt. 624), Mt. Torrey Road (Rt. 894), and Lyndhurst Road/Nursery Road (Rt. 664) in Lyndhurst in the South River District.

Allen E. Bocock Jr. and Linda S. Bocock (TMP 075-9E, 075-5B, 075-4A, 075-2D, 075-5, 075-6, 075-4C, 075-4E, 074-139Y1, and 074-139Y) and Dennis Lee Bradley Sr. & Etal Trustee (TMP 075-8) A general description of the property's location is as follows: north and south of Guthrie Road (Route 652), east of White Hill Road (Route 654), and northwest of Tinkling Spring Road (Route 608).

Chairman

Secretary

PRESENT: G. Campbell, Chairman
L. Howdyshell, Vice Chairman
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K. Leonard
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C. Stoerker, Planner I

VIRGINIA: At the Regular Meeting of the Augusta County Planning Commission held on Tuesday, January 12, 2021, at 7:00 p.m. in the Board Room, Augusta County Government Center, Verona, Virginia.

DETERMINATION OF A QUORUM

Mr. Campbell stated as there were seven (7) members present, there was a quorum.

Mr. Campbell stated that there would be election of new officers for the year 2021.

Mrs. Carolyn Bragg nominated Mr. Larry Howdyshell as Chairman. The motion was seconded by Mr. Thom Jennings with all in favor. Mrs. Kitra Shiflett nominated Robert Thomas for Vice-Chairman. Mr. Jennings seconded the motion with all in favor. Mrs. Bragg nominated Leslie Tate as secretary. The motion was seconded by Mr. Jennings with all in favor.

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Minutes

Mrs. Shiflett moved to approve the minutes of the called and regular meeting held on November 10, 2020.

Mrs. Bragg seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

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Public Hearing

Mr. Howdyshell stated that there were three public hearings on the agenda.

Mrs. Tate read the first request which was to rezone from General Agriculture to General Industrial with proffers approximately 108 acres owned by Leslie L. and Karen A. Bell (TMP 046 82) located on the north side of Woodrow Wilson Parkway (Rt. 262) approximately 0.5 miles southeast of the intersection of Woodrow Wilson Parkway (Rt. 262) and Lee Highway (U.S. Rt. 11) in Verona in the Beverley Manor District. The proposed general use of the property is industrial. The general uses of the property as stated in the Comprehensive Plan are Industrial, where industrial uses of varying scale and scope would be appropriate, and Community Mixed Use, which may include a variety of residential uses at a density of six to twelve dwelling units per acre and, on up to 40% of the total land area, retail and office uses and in some, but not all cases, industrial uses, active and passive recreational facilities.

Mr. Howdyshell asked if the property owners were present and wished to speak.

Mr. Ray Burkholder of Balzer & Associates spoke on behalf of the owners. Mr. Burkholder stated that the proffered conditions were clear and that they are looking to the future to see what can be done with the rest of the property that would be in keeping with the Comprehensive Plan. He stated that the property made sense with the Comp Plan.

Mr. Howdyshell opened the public hearing asking if anyone wished to speak on the rezoning request.

With no one to speak for or against the request, Mr. Howdyshell closed the public hearing.

Mrs. Bragg made a motion to approve the rezoning request.

Mr. Leonard seconded the motion which was carried unanimously.

Mrs. Tate introduced the next item on the agenda. A request to rezone from General Agriculture to General Business with proffers (portion along Nursery Road and Mt. Torrey Road) and Single-Family Residential with proffers (portion along Lyndhurst Road, Lyndhurst Station Road, and Mt. Torrey Road) approximately 6 acres owned by Waynesboro Nurseries, Inc. (TMP 085A (2) 7, 9, 10) located in the triangular land created by Lyndhurst Station Road (Rt. 624), Mt. Torrey Road (Rt. 894), and Lyndhurst Road/Nursery Road (Rt. 664) in Lyndhurst in the South River District. The proposed general use of the property is business and residential. The general use of the property stated in the Comprehensive Plan is Low Density Residential, which may include detached residential units at a density of between one-half and one dwelling unit per acre.

Mr. Howdyshell asked if the applicant was present and wished to speak.

Mr. Jeff Ward, an attorney for the property owner, spoke on behalf of the owner and the developer of the proposed Dollar General Store. Mr. Ward stated that they were primarily interested in the business portion of the property. Mr. Ward stated that the property really

isn't too good for general agriculture. Mr. Ward stated that the amount of people and traffic that go by daily is what makes this property a great choice for business. He stated there are roads on all sides. Industries in the area and nearby interstates would bring potential customers.

Mr. Leonard asked what the potential store hours would be.

Mr. Ward stated that he was not absolutely sure but he thought it would be 9:00 -10:00 P.M.

Mr. Leonard asked if they had considered moving the location to the center of the property.

Mr. Ward stated that they had discussed positioning the entrance off of Lyndhurst Rd.

Mr. Burkholder stated that that was worked out between the property owner. He stated that they tried to have some advanced buffering.

Mr. Howdyshell opened the public hearing asking if anyone present wished to speak in favor of this request.

Mr. Peter Wray with Triangle Realtors who represents Waynesboro Nurseries stated that the property was more compatible with commercial or light industrial. He stated that the owners are completely open to any suggestions.

Mrs. Ressie King, a neighbor to the property, stated that she felt this would change the character of the town. She stated that it was on a very speedy road that has had lots of accidents. Mrs. King stated that she did not think this was a good spot for a business.

Timothy Plummer of 50 Lyndhurst Station Rd. stated that he was the creator of the petition against the store being located in the area. He stated that the concerns listed on the petition include light pollution, the increase of potential crime in the area, traffic, noise, decrease in property value, and the condition of the road.

With no one else to speak on the matter, Mr. Howdyshell closed the public hearing.

Mr. Jennings stated that he could understand the property owners to want to do something with the property. He mentioned that he was concerned about the character of the community.

Mr. Bragg stated that she agreed with Mr. Jennings in the concern for the character of the community and the housing. She stated that she also has concerns with the traffic.

Mrs. Bragg made a motion to deny the rezoning request.

Mr. Jennings seconded the motion.

With a 5-2 vote, the motion to deny was carried.

Mrs. Tate introduced the next item on the agenda being a request for a substantial accord determination pursuant to Virginia State Code Section 15.2-2232 for the Round Hill Solar LLC Special Use Permit request to construct and operate a large solar energy system (83 MW) on property owned by the following landowners: Allen E. Bocock Jr. and Linda S. Bocock (TMP 075-9E, 075-5B, 075-4A, 075-2D, 075-5, 075-6, 075-4C, 075-4E, 074-139Y1, and 074-139Y) and Dennis Lee Bradley Sr. & Etal Trustee (TMP 075-8) A general

description of the properties location is as follows: north and south of Guthrie Road (Route 652), east of White Hill Road (Route 654), and northwest of Tinkling Spring Road (Route 608). The acreage for all parcels is approximately 880 acres and the proposed acreage to be developed with photovoltaic panels is approximately 560 acres. All properties are in the Riverheads District. Parcels included in this request are located in either Community Development Areas/Low Density Residential (1/2 to 1 unit per acre) or Agriculture Conservation Areas of the adopted Comprehensive Plan.

“So, this request is not a rezoning. It’s a little bit different, and I’m going to review the request coming before the Commission. The request is by Round Hill Solar LLC. They have applied for a special use permit, which would need to be approved by the Board of Supervisors. Tonight’s consideration is before the Planning Commission. You will see the code section here. It’s Virginia State Code Section 15.2-2232, essentially a public facilities review. The state code section does specifically call out utility scale solar, that is not permitted by-right, and would require a special use permit. The determination before the Commission is to evaluate if the location, character, and extent of the proposed solar facility is in substantial accord with the Comprehensive Plan or parts thereof. Can I get the next slide, please?

As you will note in the staff report, which is kind of separated into two separate reports, one focused on those three terms, the location, the character and the extent. You’ll note that the area, and I’ll show you a map shortly. The project is proposed to be cited in a Community Development Area of the Comprehensive Plan. That’s the area between Churchmans Mill Road and White Hill Road and then the rest of the proposed project is within an Agricultural Conservation Area of the Comprehensive Plan. I’m not going to read it in its entirety, but I do note in that report based on those locations in the Planning Policy Areas.

What does our Comprehensive Plan say those areas should entail? For the Community Development Areas, local community settlements, which have existing public water or public sewer. In this case, public water exists along White Hill Road. They are appropriate locations for future low-density rural land uses. Again, based upon road access. The existing land use pattern in the proximity to existing public facilities and services, they plan to remain predominately residential in character. So, that defines the Planning Policy Area between Churchmans Mill Road and White Hill Road. To reiterate, its moderate amounts of small scale residential and employment growth. Limited expansions of public sewer. Obviously its only public water envisioned in that area. Small scale, low intensity, potentially commercial development, but for the most part residential, low density residential.

The next Planning Policy Area, of which the majority of the project is located, is in an Agricultural Conservation Area. These are areas which have mainly farm and forest uses and generally have the lowest overall density of residential uses. They have no public water or sewer service and will not have the extension of those services until some amendment of the plan. They have most of the County’s intensive agricultural operations, they plan to remain predominantly in agriculture and forest uses, with very little additional residential development. So, that’s the summary of the two Planning Policy Areas in which this project is proposed. That gets to the location piece.

The character piece of the consideration as you will note in the staff report on the surrounding character of the proposed request is predominantly agricultural or rural residential development. Large farm acreage or some smaller, subdivided lots and general agriculture zoning. You will note that the proposed solar facility has frontage along White Hill Road, Churchmans Mill Road, Guthrie Road and Tinkling Spring Road. The area has a rolling topography, which we have noted, makes vegetative buffering difficult in some locations. The majority of the project area is planned to remain in agriculture other than the Community Development Area, which is between White Hill Road and Churchmans Mill Road.

The extent of the project is a little tricky because typically for an extent consideration with a public facility, you are reviewing something like a school. You're noting if the extent and the size of that school is representative of the need of the community. It's a little different with utility scale solar in the fact that we all need electricity and we do have demands from the state in terms of renewable energy portfolios and so some of that is kind of identified in the extent.

I will note that the proposed facility would be placed on approximately 880 total acres of which a little over 550 would be proposed under panel with the other acreage in buffering and other open land uses. So, in summary, I will then point out what you see on the screen that the Comprehensive Plan was amended in August of 2020 and we did incorporate some policies specific to utility scale solar facilities. So, in a subsequent staff report that you also received, staff went through these 11 policies to highlight some of the points where this project may or may not conform to those policies. You have the staff report and I'm not going to go into every specific one.

The applicant submitted a comprehensive economic impact analysis in terms of revenue assessment and things of that nature, which you have all received. The preservation of rural view sheds is something that is discussed in the policies. As we've noted in several places based on topography, buffering may be difficult at some locations specifically talking about the area between Churchmans Mill Road and White Hill Road. Guthrie Road has a much lower daily traffic count, then Tinkling Spring and White Hill Road. The average daily trip data provided by VDOT is included in your staff report.

In the staff report, we do identify areas where there are some existing residential development. Specifically, in the area along White Hill Road where there have been some lots divided over time and some residential development that is envisioned to continue within that area.

We have notes in your staff report regarding prime farmland and agricultural soils. That soils data comes from our Commissioner of Revenue's Office. The soils are classified in various classes with Class I being the best for farming purposes. It's included in your staff report that on this specific property, none of the soils fall within Class I, but a significant percentage, 72%, do fall within Class II or III, which are kind of a step up from those best for farming purposes, so I will point that out as one consideration. There are no agricultural forestal districts nearby.

The consideration of visual impacts and mitigation of impacts through buffers. The applicant submitted an extensive buffering plan for you to review. We have noted some

areas where based on rolling topography and location of houses at a higher elevation than the project, buffering is difficult. As far as the balance of land uses as another consideration, it is the desire to balance the utility scale solar land use with other important and valuable land uses for our citizens. The Stuarts Draft development area, which is directly south of the project, as designated in the Comprehensive Plan, is a little under 13,000 acres. We envision that area to develop with residential, business and industrial development radiating out to low density residential development, which is envisioned as I've discussed between Churchmans Mill Road and White Hill Road.

A lot of that acreage in Stuarts Draft is still undeveloped, planned for development, so this project sits to the southeast of the development area south of Staunton into Greenville and southwest of the Fishersville development area. I will note that 880 acres is a significant size for a single land use, specifically a little over 550 under photovoltaic panel. The total Agricultural Conservation Area in between the three development areas represents about 4,225 acres and the Rural Conservation Area about 3,199 acres, and there is a map included in your packets showing that area.

As far as compact, interconnected development, we do envision that in our Urban Service Areas and also in our Community Development Areas. The area between White Hill Road and Churchmans Mill Road is envisioned to develop as low density residential, as it has from the south. We do have a policy consideration for open space. There are some areas obviously that are left in buffers with this project and some wildlife corridors where the fencing is avoided due to wetlands, and that would create breaks in the fence line boundary.

The policy for interconnectivity. The majority of this project is not adjacent to land that is significantly developed, although there is some rural residential development in several areas around the project. It would not create some kind of break in the interconnectivity, although the area between Churchmans Mill and White Hill Road, we would envision, and our ordinance would require any other development to connect to adjacent property planned for development. The other things to consider, the project avoids locating panels and other equipment within our wetland areas. I have noted the fertile soils on the property. The applicant has proposed to utilize the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation Pollinator Smart Program to become a Pollinator Smart certified project. As far as putting pollinators and native vegetation in the buffer areas and underneath panels. This project area is not densely wooded and would not cause the loss of significant forest land.

Specifically, the project does not affect any known historic or archaeological resources. So that's the review of the 11 policies that are within the Comprehensive Plan. Can you go to the next slide, please? The parcels are outlined in red up on the screen. This represents the entire 800 or so acres. Next slide, please. This map shows the Planning Policy areas. So, based on my previous summary, the three parcels that you see in orange on the screen are within a Community Development Area, so that's the area with public water envisioned for low density residential development. The other portion of the project that you see in that green color, those fall within the Agricultural Conservation Area intended to remain in farming, not to receive public utility extension. Certainly, under general agriculture zoning, lots can be divided over time for residential development at one lot per year. Next slide, please.

This is the concept plan of the project showing the panel boundaries, and then you can see the breaks in wetland areas and other breaks in the fence line. You can see Guthrie Road bisecting the project, so north and south of Guthrie Road, and then you can also see the portion between White Hill and Churchmans Mill Road. Next slide, please. This is that same map; it just shows an aerial view to give you a little bit more context of the existing area. You can see that it's mostly rural, either farm or pastoral land, or some residential lots in general agriculture zoning. This map gives you a little bit brighter picture of the project boundary. The fence line boundary in blue and all of those red dots represent adjacent houses. All of this is included in the packet of information you received showing distances to the project from those specific residences.

This slide that is also included in your packet shows the buffer types. So, you'll see the most robust buffer proposed shown in orange and it is along White Hill Road. The next most robust buffer is buffer Type B and you can see that in yellow that's running along Churchmans Mill Road on the other side, it catches all of Guthrie Road and then up and around an existing dwelling and an existing church north of Guthrie Road. The least robust buffer proposed encompasses the southern portion of the project and fills in some existing vegetation at certain location. Next slide, please.

I'll let the applicant get more into their buffering plan, but just wanted to provide you some high-level plan details as far as those buffer plans are concerned. Next slide, please. The applicant provided some visual simulations in their packet and I believe they have others to share with you. That is all I have to summarize the project location, the project size and extent. Certainly, what's before you tonight is the substantial accord determination for whether or not you feel that this project, its location, character, and extent, with its proposed special use permit draft conditions is in substantial accord with the County's Comprehensive Plan. So, that's all I have and I'd be happy to answer questions. Any questions?"

Mr. Howdyshell asked if the applicant was present and wished to speak.

"I wanted to introduce myself. My name is Dave Stoner. I am with Strata Solar and I'm here to present the Round Hill Solar Project this evening. I wanted to thank the Planning Commission and staff for all your work on reviewing the project thus far and the opportunity to present the project this evening. I think I have some slides, if we could queue those up. There we go. I'm gonna give a brief, just a very brief overview of the project, an introduction to Strata, and then Valerie Long will talk a little bit about the SUP process and the 2232 comp plan review process. Just briefly introducing the team members here this evening. Again, I'm Dave Stoner. I'm with the development team of Strata Solar. Also, here in the back of the room are Jamie Weist and Ellen Tusing. They're engineers with Kimley Horn, our project engineer, and Valerie Long will be presenting also tonight. She's with Williams Mullen. A very brief overview of the Round Hill project. Leslie did a good job of this already, so I won't go through all of this in detail. Round Hill Solar, LLC is a wholly owned subsidiary of Strata Solar. It is an 83-megawatt project located just north of Stuarts Draft and as Leslie mentioned, it would represent a 560-acre development on about 880 acres. One thing I notice about the acreage is – and again, as you're thinking about a relative conversion of Ag land to solar use and perceived impacts on Ag economy and those kind of things – that acreage represents less than one half of one percent of the Ag land in the County. It depends which statistics you use. It's point

three percent of the Ag zoned land, and it's point four percent of what's called the productive agricultural land, about 200,000 acres in the County. So again, just think about that – less than one half of one percent. The project interconnects to the existing transmission lines on site; I'll talk about that in a minute. Power sales will be to a local or regional utility. The project represents about a 100-million-dollar investment in the County. We've been developing the project for a couple of years. We hope to finish development this year in 2021, move into construction in 2022, and be commercially in operation end of 22 or early 2023. I think I mentioned Round Hill Solar, LLC is a wholly owned subsidiary of Strata Solar. Strata is one of the leading U.S. companies in the utility scale solar business, based in Durham, North Carolina. It's a fully integrated company – we develop new projects like this, we build projects, both for ourselves and other third parties, we own and we operate and maintain projects. The top right there map shows the footprint across the U.S. Strata's done over 200 projects totaling 2,000 megawatts in over 22 states. We have 400 professional staff plus about 1,000 construction staff, which varies upon the number of construction projects running at any one time. So, a huge wealth of experience in the industry doing these kinds of projects. Specifically, here in Virginia, Strata's probably built more projects than anybody else of this utility scale size. We've built 7 projects thus far totaling 267 megawatts. Those 7 projects were built under contract to Dominion and we now operate those projects under contract to Dominion. We have an additional five projects that are under construction, either last year in 2020 or this year in 2021, totaling an additional 362 megawatts, and we have a development pipeline of 10 additional projects that are like this, Round Hill, in the development stage. Strata also enjoys a close working relationship with Dominion Power selling projects to Dominion, building projects for Dominion, and operating projects for Dominion. We have no relationships with Dominion at this time on this project, but as I said, we have a close working relationship with Dominion, so that could be a partner in the project at some future point. So why are we hearing so much about solar, utility scale solar in particular, in Virginia? This body had reviewed a prior project in the County some time ago. Solar's a huge new growth industry that rural communities and landowners can benefit from. Rural communities benefiting by jobs, tax base, diversifying their economies, landowners benefitting by being able to earn income on their land for a benign use the way they see fit. It's one of the cheapest new energy sources today. Solar costs have dropped 80 percent in the last 10 years and that's why utilities like Dominion, like Appalachian Power, and others have embraced utility scale solar in their future energy plans, as has the State of Virginia is significantly encouraging new utility scale solar in the state's energy plan. That transition is happening not just in Virginia. It's really a nationwide trend and again, driven by the compelling economics of utility scale solar. There's a lot of misconceptions out there regarding utility scale solar projects, so before I jump into the details of this project, let me touch on a couple of those. First and foremost, it represents a non-intrusive land use. These panels sit out there, they collect sunlight, they produce energy, on top of essentially a pasture of grass and clover for decades. That's what they do. They don't produce noise, there's no glare or light that comes from the project, and there's no real health, safety, or environmental concerns with these projects. We've included a glare study in our project application that demonstrates there's no glare from the project. There's a number of published reports that detail that there really are no health, safety, or environmental concerns. We've included a white paper from North Carolina State University as a third-party report documenting that. Similarly, there's often concerns about

oh my gosh, there's gonna be impact to my property values if I'm a neighbor. Again, similarly, study after study across the country has shown that there's really no significant cost or concern about decreasing property values, even when the solar project is sitting there out in the open for all to see. Again, for this particular project, we included a study by Callahan Associates, a well-known appraisal firm based in Virginia, demonstrating that there won't be impacts to property values if this project moves forward. All of these projects, per state DEQ stormwater rules, are designed to have equal or lower stormwater runoff of peak flow and total volume than preexisting conditions. A lot of concerns about stormwater, about sedimentation and erosion control – the fact is, we will hold a DEQ permit that will force us to design the project to have equal or less stormwater runoff from the site, or we won't be allowed to move forward. All of these projects are also designed with decommissioning in mind. After the 35 years of those panels sitting in a pasture like condition producing power, those panels and the equipment can be removed, the site can be reclaimed, and allow the site to return to agriculture or its prior use. Again, in our permit application, we've included a decommissioning plan, a decommissioning cost estimate, and a plan to provide decommissioning security, all in conformance with the zoning ordinance of the County. Now talk a little bit of details about the site. Again, Leslie covered this well, so I'll skip through this pretty quickly. First and foremost, why did we pick this site? First and foremost, we had willing landowner partners who desired to use their land and earn income from their land in this way. The site itself is sufficiently large and of suitable rolling topography to allow a project like this to be developed. Again, large enough that it's all contiguous, but leaves lots of room for generous buffer areas and reasonable setbacks. There's a transmission line on site to allow us to interconnect. I would note we're not connecting to the large lattice tower transmission line that dominates the skyline in that area, we're connecting to the smaller H-frame wood line on 15 kV line adjacent to that transmission line. The area is rural with few immediate neighbors. It's mostly farmland, which minimizes impacts on natural habitats. The site is also zoned General Agriculture, so even though most of it is an Ag Conservation Area and less than 10 percent is in a Community Development Area, all of that land is zoned GA and the zoning ordinance allows utility scale solar pursuant to an SUP. Leslie had this slide up before. This is our site plan, including our buffering plan, and I'll just point out a couple of features here. The colors that sort of jump out and again, our buffering plan and colors is slightly different than the one Leslie showed – the colors that jump out essentially around our perimeter of the site ... Again, what I was saying is the bright green and yellow areas represent newly planted vegetative buffers across the site. We have three different buffer types. Those buffer types, they all range from 30 to 50 feet wide. They're all multiple rows of either evergreen, or evergreen mixed with deciduous trees and shrubs. And you'll note that those newly planted buffers exist around the entire perimeter of the site, including all roads that bisect the site. The other thing that I would mention is along the top of the northern end of the project site, you'll see orange. That represents existing wooded areas, wood lots, fenced roads that will be preserved as part of our buffering plan, so we tried to utilize existing wood lots wherever we can. You'll see the same down in the southwest corner along White Hill Road; there's a small wood lot there that's preserved and a number of wood lines and tree lines down on the southeast part of the site along Tinkling Springs Road. The second thing I'd ask you to note is our setbacks. Again, I mentioned before, this is a large enough site to allow for generous setbacks. The county's zoning ordinance requires two hundred feet, unless the applicant can show rationale for

something other than that. There was a lot of debate about that in the update to the zoning ordinance recently. Our proposed setbacks range from 50 to over 950 feet, in terms of setback from property line to where the fence line surrounding panels would be. On the small side, we've proposed 50-foot buffers in areas. You can see on sort of the - basically in all areas where the project borders existing Ag land or along Guthrie Road, where you have a very gravel, limited travel, rural road – again, we're trying to utilize the site as best we can and not have to sprawl the site out further so those smaller buffers in areas where there's no real concerns with neighboring land use in terms of proximity of fence line and panels, we've proposed 50 foot buffers. In areas where there is rural residential neighbors, we've proposed significantly greater buffers. For example, along White Hill Road, the smallest buffer in that area is 200 feet along the road. We actually amended our site plan in discussions with staff to pull the panel areas north further and provide buffers on the order of 500 to 800 feet on those rural residences along White Hill Road and portions of Churchmans Mill Road. Similarly, on the east side of the project near Tinkling Springs Road, I would note that our fence lines sit about a quarter mile back from Tinkling Springs Road – anywhere from 1,000 to 1,500 feet. Now that's from Tinkling Springs Road; our setbacks from neighboring properties in this area vary anywhere from 200 feet at a minimum to again, similarly 500 feet where we're in proximity to some rural residential lots or residences. The grey hatched area that Leslie pointed out before; those are panel areas and I would stress that that's our maximum panel area. It's not that all of these areas will be covered in panels; it's those are the areas within which when we do our final design, we will locate panels within. Actual panel coverage will be less than what you see here, but they will only be located within those grey hatched areas. Up at the northeast corner of the project site is where our project substation will be located, where we interconnect to the transmission grid. We picked that project substation specifically to sort of be tucked up behind Mr. Bocock's existing farm buildings and again, limiting use of that roads accessing the project, pretty much almost all but save one come off of Guthrie Road. That's by design; we envision to construct a traffic plan that will bring traffic off of 81 down White Hill Road and then accessing this site along Guthrie Road – again, specifically designed to minimize traffic impacts during construction on the surrounding area. As Leslie mentioned before, we've also mapped and avoided wetlands, drainage areas, et cetera. The other thing I'd point out, as Leslie mentioned, is the area between Churchmans Mill and White Hill Road on the western part of the site. That's the Community Development Area that's been discussed about; that represents less than 10 percent of this overall project. We've included it in the project, however, because we need it for panels. We're locked into our 83-megawatt project size because of the interconnection process we went through with Dominion, which we've signed an interconnection agreement. That study process is a two-year process. We applied at that size two years ago in order to do the project that we're proposing here. With adequate setbacks and such, we think we need that land in that area, although we were able to essentially give up use of some of that land to give better buffers to residences in that area. Briefly, a couple of things on facility site design. Again, I've covered most of these, I'm not going to go through them, but I'll point you to two things. Again, there's misconceptions. People think these panel areas are going to be completely covered in glass. If you look at the top right picture, you can see that's not the case. There's generous spacing of 10 to 15 feet between rows of panels, and notice the ground cover under that. A key part of our project design is preserving soils on site during construction so that a

healthy, robust ground cover can be established, typically a grass clover mix as you see here. That ground cover preserves soils over the life of the project, encourages infiltration, and reduces runoff. Similarly, in unused areas of the site, our buffer areas, we'll be planting pollinator friendly species, native grasses. There's an example there, again, using planting buffer areas in that way minimizes our having to maintain them, preserves soils, encourages infiltration, and provides significant wildlife and bird habitat. People are often concerned about what the project's gonna look like. We'll go through a couple of visual simulations, or views of what the project might look like. I would say that the goal of our buffering and setbacks is not to hide the project unilaterally from view. The comp plan doesn't require that, the zoning ordinance doesn't require that. What it does require is that we do our best to significantly mitigate viewshed impacts, and that's what we think we do with these proposed buffer areas. This is going north on White Hill Road as you come down the hill. Again, this is a simulation of the project right after construction. You can see panels and fence line in the back, with our vegetative buffer planted in the front. And there's a view of in 6 to 10 years what that vegetative buffer will look like. We think it does a really effective job initially of breaking up views and clearly does a good job as that buffer matures. A similar view from the center of the site – this is on Guthrie Road looking sort of southwest. Again, you can see the large panel area off to your left to the south, fence line in front of it, buffer at planting. Again, you'll see that buffer in 6 to 10 years will look like that, will effectively screen a lot of those views along Guthrie Road. Lastly, Tinkling Spring Road. As I mentioned, our panel fence line's 1500 feet, almost a quarter mile off the road there. Behind the house there, you can see grey panel areas on that rise and to the left. And again, while the vegetative buffering does not completely hide those panels from view, you can see the vegetative buffer around the edge of those panels from that sort of far field view. Let me transition and I'll wrap up here in just a few minutes and turn it over to Valerie. The project brings a number of benefits. It represents about a 100-million-dollar investment that will bring over 6 million dollars of direct payments to the County. Those payments come from a 1 million dollar up front siting agreement payment we proposed as part of the siting agreement with the County, about 116,000 dollars annually in revenue share payments; that totals a little over 4 million dollars for the life of the project. Now contrast that to that site currently pays the County 4,500 dollars in taxes as compared to 116,000 after this project is built each year. Additionally, if the County chooses to reassess the land, we estimate that could produce up to 35,000 additional dollars in taxes each year. In addition to those direct payments to the County, a 100 million construction project, we estimate again, based on the economic study that was included in our application, will stimulate the local economy to the tune of about 30 million dollars, contracts, purchase of goods and services, hospitality during that 12-month construction phase, and about 700,000 dollars annually during operations. The project will bring jobs. We estimate about 400 construction jobs during the 12-month construction period, and 8 to 10 permanent jobs in operations, maintenance, and groundskeeping. The project brings all those financial benefits to the area with very minimal requirements for Augusta County services. The project doesn't use water, doesn't need wastewater services, won't stress on schools, doesn't really need a lot of emergency services. Again, in the interest of time, some of the other benefits are listed there. I'll go to the last bullet. Solar projects like this, actually do represent - while they do represent a conversion of land use from agriculture to solar production, they do represent a form of long-term open land preservation. At the end of the project life, 30, 35 years out,

these panels can be removed, the land can be reclaimed, and can be returned to agriculture. I can guarantee you in 35 years, if this project doesn't happen, you will see rural residential encroachment on that site, as even called for by the Comprehensive Plan. It's not going to remain Ag fields forever. Lastly, of course, projects like this, again, allow landowners to use the land in a nonobtrusive way to earn income for themselves and those families the way they desire. There's a number of environmental benefits there - I won't go through all of them, other than I will say that the project will produce enough clean, reliable, renewable energy for about 14,000 Virginia homes. That's roughly equivalent to the number of residential units in Stuarts Draft and Waynesboro combined, so this is a large project producing a large amount of power. Not all the electrical needs of that area, but roughly equivalent to that number of residences. With that, I'm going to turn it over to Valerie, and she was going to speak a little bit about the permitting process going forward and our comp plan compliance directly. I'll be available for questions afterwards. Thank you very much."

Mr. Howdyshell asked the next presenter to state her name and who she was with.

"My name is Valerie Long. I'm an attorney with the law firm of Williams Mullen, here assisting the project team and the applicant this evening. My plan is to specifically address the issue here before you tonight, the section 2232 comprehensive plan compliance review. As Dave touched on briefly, I'll just start, however, by discussing that the application that we submitted I know is very voluminous. We tried to be extraordinarily comprehensive in ensuring that we met all of the application requirements, those of which I've listed on the screen. It's our contention that our – our application also included a substantial accord analysis of how the application complies with the Comprehensive Plan. It goes into great detail. I'll cover some of all of that tonight, but not all of it. But we hope that you will agree after tonight's presentation that we have provided substantial evidence to demonstrate to your satisfaction that you can make an affirmative finding that this application is in fact in compliance, in substantial accord with your Comprehensive Plan or part thereof. Again, I know you all know this, but just for perhaps for the benefit of the audience and others who have not participated in Section 2232 review in the past pursuant to the Virginia Code, it requires that any public facilities, including solar, utility scale solar projects like this, must be reviewed by the County's Planning Commission to make a determination that the application is in substantial accord with the County's Comprehensive Plan or part thereof. It does not require 100 percent compliance with every single element or every single word in the Comprehensive Plan, which, as you all know, is a general guide. It's very broad. It's aspirational. It does not have the force of law like a zoning ordinance, but of course, it's very important for you all for your planning purposes going forward. Again, for the benefit of the audience, cause I know you all know this, the County in Augusta adopted 11 new policies that were added to the Comprehensive Plan that very specifically spoke to the issue of utility scale solar. Ms. Tate covered those in her presentation; I'm going to cover a few of them now. I'm not going to go through all of them necessarily. We do have slides on each one, so to the extent there is any questions from any of you about any of those policies, we are prepared to provide greater detail if you would like. But again, we believe that with regard to the

general location, character, and extent of the project, that you can make a finding that the application is in substantial accord with the plan or substantial accord with part thereof. These are the list of the 11 policies. Ms. Tate already went through those, but I just put them up for the benefit of the group. I'll start with the first one. I'm just gonna kind of summarize and hit the high points. The first one is with regard to the economy and it speaks to recognizing the employment opportunities and the economic diversification opportunities that utility scale solar can provide. In that regard, the project would substantially contribute to the jobs and workforce development and training programs in the community, would generate substantial County revenues, and would diversify that tax revenue base as described. We have proposed a variety, we have proposed a siting agreement that the Board of Supervisors has the option to enter into at their discretion. We have proposed that in the event the County adopts a revenue sharing ordinance for solar, which the general legislature has authorized in its most recent updates to the state code, that that is the 116,000 dollars per year. It's based on a state formula. This project would generate that each year, and again, there would be a substantial increase in tax revenues, assuming the land is reassessed. With regard to the local economy, this project would result in a real shot in the arm in terms of substantial funds generated and produced from the local economy during construction, also during operations. Policy number two speaks to the issue of rural viewsheds and the desire to maintain those rural viewsheds and agriculture, but it sees synergy with utility scale solar, so long as the clustering, size, and fragmentation does not create undue adverse impacts on the surrounding neighborhoods. As you all know, the area is predominately agriculture. There is sparse residential development in the area. This project would not fragment any of that development area, and the project does substantially mitigate the visual impacts of the project through a combination of its careful location, the setbacks that are established or would be established throughout the property – some of them at very substantial distances – and the variety of vegetative buffers and widths that are proposed. And again, we took great care in designing the specific setback distances and types of buffers in each area to be very respectful of the surrounding and adjacent uses to sort of balance the efficient utilization of the land, but also be very respectful of adjacent uses. Again, there will be some distant views that would remain from some parcels, but those are broken up by topography and vegetation in many areas. It will mainly predominately maintain that rural viewshed through the use of the buffers and setbacks, particularly as the buffers grow and mature over time. And again, the policy does not require that 100 percent of the visibility of the project be eliminated – I don't think your ordinance or Comprehensive Plan requires that of any use – it certainly wouldn't be possible with this use, so we've worked very hard to follow the precise guidelines of the Comprehensive Plan that speak specifically to mitigating visual impact through buffers and vegetation. The third one's about agricultural landscaping and economy. We've spoken about this a little bit; again, it has a negligible impact to the agricultural economy. We certainly understand and respect the significance of the agricultural economy to Augusta County, and we know how important that is here. The property associated with this project is a very small percentage of the County's overall agricultural land, and most importantly, through the combination of proposed ground coverings, native vegetation, buffering, and other techniques, the soil will be preserved, will be used and able to be reused later. The ground coverings will address concerns. And again, at the end of the life of the project, the panels can be removed and the land can revert to functional agriculture, certainly to

open space. I think we mentioned this, but over 300 acres, which is over one third of the total site - land acreage of the site, will remain in open space, whether it's buffers, setback areas, or just unused areas such as around streams. Certainly, there's other development pressures that would be far more impactful on this property than a temporary use like solar, whether it's by-right residential subdivision, or other more intensive uses that could have a greater impact. And finally, of course, the ten percent of the land that is within the Community Development Area, of course, we would contend that rural residential subdivision could potentially have a greater impact by converting that land to residential use, have a greater impact on the agricultural landscape than the utility scale solar. Prime farmland and forestal districts – obviously, it's critical it's not located in an Ag-Forestal district. There are not any Class 1 soils. Less than a fifth of the land is considered prime farmland. I would also call your attention – there was a letter that was submitted to you all from the public, I believe it may have come in today, from a former employee of the USDA Conservation Service who worked very closely with Mr. Bocock, the landowner, on assisting him with his farming on site for many, many years and I'll refer you to that letter for specifics about his very, very specific experience working with this land and the fact that it was very challenging to farm. We think this is a good use for the landowner and obviously supports these goals of the Comprehensive Plan. And certainly, with regard to impacts on the land – certainly, there are other, more intense uses that could be far more impactful. Again, another very important policy is with regard again to visual impact and siting. The policy says to take into consideration how the visual impacts to neighborhoods can be mitigated through buffers, and it suggests you strive to use existing vegetation and buffers. And again, we have worked very hard to mitigate the visual impacts of the project on nearby residences and certainly public roads as well through a combination of careful siting, the setbacks, the buffers, the preservation of existing woodlands and hedge rows. Again, the policy doesn't say that you have to completely eliminate the visibility, but to mitigate the visibility, and we've worked very hard to do that. There's limited visibility from the north – again, from Tinkling Springs Road, they're very distant views, they're intermittent from some of the other areas along and near White Hill Road and Churchmans Mill Road. There will be some remaining visibility, particularly from some of the residences that are at higher elevation, but some of them will be distant and some of them will be mitigated through the existence of the buffers, particularly as those buffers grow. Likewise, with regard to balancing the land uses, again, the Comprehensive Plan, you all did a very nice job of recognizing that there's a lot of balancing that has to go on when you're talking about utility scale solar – balancing the economic opportunities, the job opportunities against the need for preserving the agricultural economy and visual impacts. Balancing all those uses together speaks to focusing on the infrastructure for the County Service Authority. I won't go into too much detail here, but again, as Ms. Tate indicated, there is a very large area between all the designated growth areas. This land is about 90 percent of that large area, which I think is about 7,500 acres. This is less than 10 percent of that area, just in that area in the middle. It represents a very small component, so although it's a large project site, it's a very small portion of that land, that 7500-acre area that's in Ag and rural conservation. And again, the project site is less than half of one percent of the entire Ag land in the County. It also provides financial benefits to the landowners to use their land as they see fit. It won't conflict with any County service authority infrastructure. We did not receive any comments from the Service Authority as part of their review that expressed any concerns for the proposal. This is a similar copy

of your Comprehensive Plan development area. It's a little hard to see - there's a lot going on here, and I know our laser pointer isn't working on this screen, but you can see in those areas in sort of boxes all around the labels indicating the locations of the various development areas and then mostly right in the middle is the project site area. You can see it outlined in black and you can see that the vast majority of that land is the green color and just the small area off to the left is the area that is for Community Development, and again, that's just 10 percent of the total project area. So again, we believe the project is very consistent with the Comprehensive Plan development areas in your plan. Another policy talks about compact, interconnected development. This one's not quite as applicable because it's not in a priority growth area. It's not in an Urban Service Area. We know that was quite a concern for the previous project that was proposed. Only a small area is in a Community Development Area and again, this land can be returned to open space or agriculture upon decommissioning. Open space, obviously another very important policy of your new Comprehensive Plan components. About, again, a third of the project will remain in open space, whether it's buffers, setbacks, or otherwise unused areas. We do provide wildlife corridors. And again, the land can be returned to open space or Ag use at the end of the project. Policy 9 is not really applicable, so I'll skip over that. Number 10 speaks to the importance of resource considerations, that projects should be designed, sited, and constructed in a way that protects and preserves the county's natural, scenic, and cultural resources. And we would note that there are no impacts that have been identified with no impacts on streams, rivers, wetlands, sensitive areas, et cetera. Strata Solar will obviously coordinate with a variety of federal and state agencies if the special use permit is approved. There's a large number of additional permits that will be required from those agencies, and again, the native vegetation will be supported by the project's enrollment in the Pollinator Smart Certification Program. And finally, the natural resource benefits, that the County sees value in projects that create additional natural resource benefits through things like native vegetation, the creation of wildlife corridors, and the use of pollinator species and buffers in and around panels and as we've described, our project would directly satisfy those goals as well. So again, I won't go through all of these, because I know there's a lot here, but we have tried to reorganize some of these points to again demonstrate that with regard to location, character, and extent – particularly when viewed in the context of these 11 new policies – that our application does substantially comply with the County's Comprehensive Plan, or parts thereof. Happy to go into more detail if you need to later. And again, the same slide again about the reminder of what the standard is that the state code asks you to make a finding for, that it is in substantial accord with the County's Comprehensive Plan or part thereof, and we believe that based on all of this information that we provided tonight, as well as all of the additional details that were in our application project, we think we've provided you with sufficient evidence so you can make that finding that it is in substantial accord. Certainly to the extent you have any questions, or would like additional information, we are obviously happy to address any questions or comments, and we are happy to address any questions or comments that come from the public during the public hearing as well. I think that's everything. Thank you. I would be happy to answer any questions now if you would like, or I can wait until the end of the public hearing."

Mr. Leonard asked Mr. Stoner to discuss the location and the engineering of the fence lines around the panels.

“Sure. And just briefly ... Quite simply, it's a chain link fence primarily for purposes of security, to keep people and wildlife out of the panel areas themselves. If you go forward to one of the visual sims ... so there's an example there. You can see the fence line behind the buffer area, encompassing the solar panels. Essentially would be either a six- or seven-foot chain link fence, a typical chain link security fencing that's either six or seven feet – I don't recall – either six or seven feet, seven feet sorry – yes, again, I think it would have typically chain-link security fencing with barbed wire along the type and again, specifically designed to keep people out of electrical generating areas as a security fence.”

Mr. Leonard asked Mr. Stoner what studies have been done on the effects on wildlife when contiguous open land is changed to a utility scale solar use.

“So, the studies that we've done thus far for wildlife has primarily been looking at what are the threatened and endangered species on the site. We have not found any evidence of any of those. In terms of existing wildlife – deer, et cetera, raccoons, whatever that might be currently using that Ag land – I think two things I would mention. One, again, the site plan here, you'll see the panel areas include a number of breaks in that fence line, predominantly, along drainage features, and so just like deer will run a fence line or will run a drainage area, we view the breaks in the panel in those areas as essentially wildlife corridors so large wildlife can move through the facility, and similarly, all of the unused areas that aren't in panel areas I mentioned before will be planted in pollinator species, native grasses, again, very wildlife friendly habitat to the tune of about a third of the land area will be planted like that. So, while again, we recognize it's a change in land use and there will be fencing limiting some wildlife movement, I think we're doing everything we can in terms of providing wildlife habitat otherwise as well as pathways for large animals to move through this area.”

Mrs. Bragg asked Mr. Stoner to clarify the location of the fencing on the site.

“Correct ... There's multiple different panel areas, each which would be enclosed with a fence, correct. Any other questions for me?”

Mrs. Bragg asked Mr. Stoner about the size of the Community Development Area in the project.

“Correct. I mean right now, we feel like the project as proposed, we need that acreage to have enough acreage to do this project. That's probably about 10 percent of our panel area, and as you can see, we're utilizing a lot of the project. Even though there's 300 acres of open space with setback and wetlands and streams, in design standpoint, it's sort of a tight site. We don't have a lot of extra room, and so that's why we've continued to propose use of that area in the Community Development Area, although we did feel like had enough leeway to give up, if you will, about a third of that area to pull panels back further from the residents in the vicinity of White Hill and Churchmans Mill. But yeah, we would worry about the project viability about not having enough space to get to that 83 megawatts of capacity without that area.”

Mrs. Bragg asked Mr. Stoner about the financial benefits of the project and the monetary investment in the County.

“Okay, I’ll be honest with you, I’m having a little bit of a hard time because I don’t know exactly what you’re referring to. I know our economic study went through three different scenarios of where whether there was income just generated from the current M&T tax approach, not the revenue share approach, so I think you might be referring to that section of the report, where we looked at potential revenues from the prior, just the M&T tools tax approach. The revenue share approach is new legislation that essentially allows the project to – if the county adopts a revenue share ordinance, the way we proposed the siting agreement, whether the County adopts a revenue share ordinance or not, we commit to a fixed revenue payment based on the 83 megawatts, and that’s the \$116,000 annually. That’s a state-mandated per megawatt number. That gets you to the 4.1 million of revenue share payments in lieu of M&T tax, if you will, plus the siting agreement, plus the additional tax revenue of a little over a million dollars if the County chooses to reassess the land. So, I don’t know if that’s helpful. I’m thinking what you’re referring to was one of the scenarios comparing just the prior M&T tax, which does potentially have composite index – I was saying comp plan – composite index impacts. That’s one of the advantages of this revenue share approach, is it won’t impact the composite index to the County at all. It’s just a simple, fixed payment to the County based on the size of the project of 116,000 dollars annually.”

Mrs. Bragg asked Mr. Stoner where the 700,000 dollars generated annually during operations came from.

“So again, both the 30 million and the 700,000 annually is how our economic Mangu Consulting’s estimate of simply by the project being here and building, spending 100 million dollars, building the project or on an annual basis, our salaries of local workers, in the fact that they will then, you know, spend those salaries in the community, the fact that we’ll be contracting with local electrical contractors, maintenance companies, et cetera during the life of the project. That 700,000 is just an estimate of additional economic stimulation of the County’s economy, not to the County directly, but of the economy in the County. It’s their estimate of by the project being here, that’s the additional monies that will spent to stimulate the economy.”

Mrs. Bragg asked if payment amounts to the landowners were reflected in the financial figures.

“I would have to confirm that. I don’t know that off hand, I don’t think so. I think this is the estimate of purchase of local goods and services, our labor, income, et cetera, but I would need to, for further report, just confirm that.”

Mr. Jennings asked why the Valley region of Virginia and Augusta County in particular with its rolling topography and other geographical challenges was attractive for utility scale solar development.

“I would – So two things there. As you may well know, there are solar projects being proposed all around the state. You’re correct, predominantly a lot of the large projects were proposed in Tidewater flat, cheap land. What’s happened is Virginia has embraced utility scale solar such that - One limiting factor about utility scale solar siting is transmission capacity. A lot of the transmission lines in the southeastern parts of the state are essentially being filled up by new solar projects. We know that utilities in the state like distributed resources. They don’t like all their generating resource in one area. It serves

the grid better if those generating sources are spread around, closer to different areas of load. So, it's not specifically that the Valley is attractive per se, it's more just that we just knew there was available transmission capacity here, we felt like it had a suitable site, notwithstanding some of the geotechnical challenges that you mentioned, and we knew that there was available transmission capacity. Again, we're not the only developer that's seen that. You've obviously had another very credible developer proposing a project here in the County. But you're right. This would be the first project that we've developed west of the Blue Ridge."

Mr. Jennings asked if Guthrie Road would have to be improved during the construction phase.

"So, for any construction project like this, we always go out prior to construction, do preconstruction road surveys, look at the quality of the road, width, et cetera, et cetera. We would do that here, and I don't know, Jamie, if you want to maybe just speak to this briefly, but broadly, in terms of improvement, we wouldn't be talking about paving or anything like that. Once we do those preconstruction surveys, you know, could there be areas that we feel like we need to improve ditches in some areas or widen the surface or add gravel? Clearly, we would do that preconstruction to ensure the roads were suitable, and similarly, we would do surveys of the road condition preconstruction, we would do the same postconstruction to ensure any damage we created to that gravel road during construction, we would be responsible for repairing, and again, I think our traffic plan details that."

Mr. Jennings asked about the location and design of the substation.

"So, I believe we included some details – plan and profile – in our application. I don't have a graphic of that handy, but basically, it's essentially a small, electrical substation. So not like Dooks – you know, Dooks substation on the other side of Waynesboro, that's a giant, huge electrical substation. Think of it like, there's the Barterbrook sub – I don't know if you know where that is, between the project site and Verona – it's typically about a maybe 200 by 200 half acre, maybe a 100 by 100 half acre fenced area that all of our underground collection lines would come into. There would be metering, it would look to the layman like a normal electrical, you know, small electrical substation. Again, on our site plan, you may have noticed we're planning to do vegetative screening around three sides once that's constructed, and we specifically located it up behind Mr. Bocock's farm buildings, again, to try to minimize visual impacts. You're right, there's tradeoffs everywhere. It is a little higher, again, and that's why we proposed the vegetative screening there. I guess I would say as compared to what you're looking at now, with the lattice towers, it's gonna be way less – even though there might be a small substation there – it's gonna be way less visually intrusive than that view that you're already looking at."

Thank you. And again, as Valerie said, we'll be available, would be happy to answer questions at the end of the public hearing."

Mr. Howdyshell opened the public hearing.

Stephen Kyle, Kristin Jackson, Thomas Weidner, David Brenneman, Judy Brenneman on behalf of Anna Brenneman, Rick Pfizenmayer, Tanya Brenneman, Leland Brenneman on

behalf of his niece Julia and his brother Byron Brenneman, Kristin Donohue, Kervin Yoder, Stan Sikorski, Rose Brown, Rick Myers, Randy Brown, Teresa Brence, Carol Demacio, and Heather Shirey all spoke against the proposed rezoning. The main issues of concern were the visual impacts on the surrounding areas, loss of farmland, and environmental impacts.

Dennis Bradley Sr., Trent Showalter, Nancy Sorrells on behalf of The Alliance for the Shenandoah Valley, Brent Douglass, and Robert Whitescarver spoke in favor of the rezoning. The main reasons mentioned for supporting the rezoning were the need for renewable energy sources, the location being suitable for the project, the positive impact on the economy.

Mr. Phil Martin, Executive Director of the Augusta County Service Authority spoke on behalf of the Service Authority board. Mr. Martin state that the comprehensive plan designates the areas between Churchmans Mill Rd. and White Hill Rd. as community development areas, meaning those areas would have water provided to them. Mr. Martin stated that a public water line had already been installed on WhiteHill Rd. The placement of the solar panel would not allow the Service Authority to have the rate paying water customers. Mr. Martin mention the planning policy that states consideration would be made on the existing Augusta County Service Authority infrastructures.

A transcript of comments is available on file in the Community Development Office along with emails sent to Commission members by the public.

Mr. Howdyshell allowed the applicant time to respond to citizen comments.

“Thank you, Mr. Howdyshell. And again, I'll be very brief. I'm not gonna go through all the comments we've heard. I guess first and foremost, like the Planning Commission, Strata welcomes all of the input. You might not believe that, but we really do. You know, projects get better based on good input from citizens and good input from commissioners like yourselves, so I appreciate hearing that and hearing those concerns. I guess a couple of things that I would say is with respect to viewshed impacts – I think Strata would welcome the opportunity to continue to try to demonstrate that those viewshed impacts are not as severe as some as been described here. I think we've tried to do a good job of that, and I think that we've met the standard of the Comprehensive Plan in terms of trying to mitigate those viewshed impacts, but I guess I would just say if the Planning Commissioners felt like they needed to see more, pun intended, in order to make a decision, Strata would be happy to try to provide some supplemental information on viewshed impacts. Specifically, a number of commenters spoke about losing their mountain views. I think those concerns may well be overstated. I think we can adjust buffer locations to try to, you know, balance the screening the project versus not impacting viewshed impacts. One thing that I would mention is, Mrs. Bragg, you mentioned some of the ACA issues before – and I think I appreciate Mr. Martin's comments specifically on that from the Board – and similarly, I think Strata would welcome the opportunity to try to be able to adjust that more directly with the ACSA. Valerie, I don't know if you had any other specific issues – right. Again, I think just in summary, Strata feels like we have a good project here. We would really like the Board's – or excuse me, the Planning Commission's – support in moving the project forward. If we failed to reach that standard,

if you have concerns with the project, and specific concerns that we can provide some more information on, we'd be happy to have the opportunity to do that, between now and a subsequent meeting, perhaps. Thank you."

With no one left to speak, Mr. Howdyshell closed the public hearing.

Mrs. Bragg spoke about her concern about the project. "Let me start by saying that I believe that it is the job of the Commission to guide growth and development in a manner that fits the vision and the expectations of our citizens as Augusta County moves into the future. We are to read and interpret the comprehensive plan in a manner that includes not only the written word but the intent of the words written. When evaluating any request brought before us we are to not only the map, but to consider the location, character, and extent of the project. We are charged to not only evaluate them based on the comprehensive plan maps, but we are to consider the impact to adjacent property owners and to the public in general. The location character intent of the project brought before us is very important. I want to start by looking at the location of what is called the Round Hill Utility Solar Project. This project consists of around 880 acres of land that is within 1.5 miles of one of the largest populated areas in our county with over 9000 people. Stuarts Draft has been intentionally developed with the purpose of drawing residents as well as business to support them. It is a well-established community that includes housing, schools and job opportunities. There are several major traveled roads which facilitate within the area including Tinkling Spring Road and White Hill Road. This project will have a visual impact from both of these arteries affecting over 14,000 travelers a day. A portion of the Round Hill project is in a community development area. This particular areas one where the investment and installation of water lines has already been made, where there is an expectation of growth and expansion. Though only a small portion of the project is actually in the community development area, that whole corridor the new Whit Hill Road corridor has been designated for growth. It has easy access to major roadways, schools, churches, stores and services that support residential living are readily available. The character of the project also needs to be considered. Just the word character describes Augusta County. This county is known for its beautiful views and for the rural nature of our communities. Every marketing publication or expansion effort that I have ever seen, related to Augusta, highlights the purity of our countryside. As you read our comprehensive plan, you find mentioned over and over the importance of preserving the scenic beauty of our County, especially related to development and growth. Our citizens have made it their priority. This project is located just outside of a major growth area. It is located on the two major roadways that feed into this highly populated community. The topography of the land, that it is proposed to cover, consists of rolling hills, making concealing of the hundreds and hundreds of acres of solar panels impossible. To say that a project of this nature and size would not drastically change the character of the community would be a falsehood. The traveling public is impacted daily, homes are boxed in destroying view sheds, and a church is completely surrounded and buried by panels. What is currently a desirable community, will be changed forever. The third consideration is the extent of the project. The mere size of an 880-acre industrial utility field is stunning. The impact of such a large project is so much greater than that of any manufacturing facility, or new housing neighborhood, that we have ever considered in Augusta. It is up to us to weigh the size, and the long term and permanent impact on this community, with the benefits that this project would provide to our citizens. The

current verbiage in the ordinance or comprehensive plan does not mention size limitations, but I do think that it is important to note that this is, in fact, a concern of the sitting Board of Supervisors. They have sent a request to the ordinance committee to review size limitations and as well as review where industrial utility scale solar project locations might be appropriately sited. The ordinance that has been developed, to provide guidance for industrial utility solar projects, is still very much a work in progress. It continues to be reviewed and to be modified. Efforts are also being made to provide better guidance in our Comprehensive Plan. As we all know, just within the last few months, verbiage was added to the Plan, inserting 11 policies to be reviewed when considering these projects, in addition to the location, character and extent. So, I just want to quickly go through these. First, In the opening sentence the words state “carefully sited utility scale solar” and these are probably the most important words in the whole section. This means that the location of a project, and its impact, are of the upmost importance. It doesn’t need to be the first project brought to us, or the second or even the third, it needs to be the right project, with the right location fit, before approval is given. Locating 880 acres of industrial fields, off of major highways, in one of our largest communities is not a “carefully sited” project. Waterlines are in the ground, development in the area is occurring, and citizen’s lives will be adversely affected. Over 14,000 people will be impacted daily by this project. Development in the area, where we encourage growth will slow, and the values of impacted homes will be in question. When you look at other similar projects, throughout the state, you note that they are intentionally placed in very rural areas, and nowhere near population centers. They are on back roads, and away from houses, businesses, and potential growth areas. Policy 1 talks about the economic impact. There is mention of employment opportunities, but there will also be local jobs lost. There is also an additional adverse impact on the farming economy that I will discuss in a moment. The County is currently in talks with the project applicant concerning financial payments, but none of that has been solidified, so really, we don’t have information related to net losses or the gains for the citizens of Augusta County. Policy 2 is about Rural view sheds. As stated before, because of the topography of this area, it will be virtually impossible to develop effective buffers. The view shed of this area is one of its most valuable assets. The policy actually states that there is “A Desire to maintain rural view sheds and agriculture as a predominant component of our economy, but sees synergy among agricultural and rural land development and utility scale solar development so long as the clustering, size, or fragmentation of such facilities does not have undue adverse impact on the surrounding neighborhoods. 1.5 miles away is a community of over 9000 people. The rural nature that welcomes all that travel to and within this community will be lost. Policy 3 talks about the agricultural landscape, and requires an assessment of the effects of the project on the agricultural economy. In Augusta County there is a lot of land that lies in agricultural areas. Some of that land is actively farmed, and some of it is passively maintained. Actively farmed land supports a very strong and vibrant agricultural economy, and makes us the second largest ag county in Virginia. In addition to supporting the farmer who works the land, and his employees, active farming supports local companies that supply fertilizer, seed, farm equipment sales and service, and building materials and fencing. Products that are a result of active farming, such as meats, poultry, grains, wools and fiber, and now medical supplements, all feed back into our local community, and have a very real effect on the economic health of agriculture locally. A large part of the land that is in this project is actively farmed. This

property supports herds of cattle, and grows soybeans, corn, alfalfa and hay. Agriculture is our number one economy in Augusta, and one that our comp plan repeatedly talks about preserving, supporting, and protecting. This project will take 880 acres of actively farmed land out of service for at least 35 years. The effect on all of the other businesses that depend on our farmers, as well as the consumers that benefit from the growth of these meats and crops, will be 35 years of economic decline. Policy 4 also talks about agriculture, and asks for a review of prime farmland producing soils and/or adjacent Agricultural and Forestal Districts. Soil quality is classed, with 1, 2, and 3 being the best soils for farming in the County. With this project, over 70% of the land involved has been determined to have class 2 and 3 soil, among the very best. This is prime farm land, and is used as such, producing crops. Policy 5 also talks about the visual impact, and buffering options. As stated above, because this project would be sited on rolling hills, there is little to nothing that can be done that will effectively shield residents from the project. When you drive on the smaller roads, whole properties will be buried by 12-foot panels at their boundaries. Planting a few trees that, in 10-15 years, might grow enough to provide partial coverage is not going to diminish the adverse impact of the project on these homes. Policies 6 and 7 refer to the balance of utility solar projects and other valuable land uses for our citizens. It also suggests that consideration for existing Augusta County Service Authority infrastructure be made. A portion of the project does lie within a community development area where there is an existing waterline in the ground. The intent of that line was to provide services to our citizens, as development occurs along White Hill Road. Policy 8 talks about open spaces and support of projects that seek to actively create opportunities for open spaces and outdoor recreational activities such as pedestrian corridors, wildlife watching areas, and fishing areas. Truthfully, I don't believe that any of these ideas relate to this specific project. The property will be fenced mostly and not open to the public. I believe that there's going to be greater loss of wildlife corridors and open spaces than will ever be gained by converting open farmland into industrial solar fields. And wrapping up my comments related to policies, 9 talks about interconnectivity and traffic patterns, 10 talks about resource considerations, again, that needs to preserve the County's natural, scenic, and cultural resources. And 11 talks about the use of native vegetation, the creation of wildlife corridors, and the use of pollinator species in buffer areas and under panels. These last three policies seem to apply to the actual project design, as opposed to being used to evaluate whether a project is in compliance with the Comprehensive plan. It does bare mentioning that in policy 11, speaking of vegetation, wildlife corridors and pollinators, farming already does that, and efforts to artificially create these uses is not necessary. So, tonight, we are to determine whether the Round Hill Utility Solar Project is in compliance with the Augusta County Comprehensive Plan. In short, I don't believe that it does. The location is in one of our most populated areas, it is not in character with the surrounding community, and the extent of the project will overshadow all that is around it. The overall impact to adjacent property owners, and the public in general, will be devastating. Part of the project is located in a community development area, with investments in infrastructure already made, and development actively occurring. Part of the project is on agricultural land. This soil is among the best in our County for farming. It will have a negative impact on the County's agricultural economy. As you evaluate the trickledown effect of removing 880 acres of actively farmed land through our community, you begin to understand the loss to local businesses and consumers. Farming jobs will be lost with only a minimal number of new jobs to replace

them. The view sheds in this area will be forever lost. The project will be located on highways, communities and on rolling hills. The project will destroy wildlife corridors and will take away many of the open spaces that we value so much. And the overall economic benefit to the citizens of Augusta has not been proven. It is not enough to simply say that because a large part of this project is farmland, they receive the golden ticket. This is a forever project, and we need to get it right the first time. There are no “do-overs” I do believe that there will be utility scale solar in Augusta, at some point. It may not be this project or the next one – but it will be one that will be “properly sited”, and will have a minimal impact on the very nature of our County.”

Mr. Jennings stated: “Were it so simple as for us to make a decision about how important view sheds are to almost all of you here tonight. We realize that it’s very important to you, would be important to me too. However, Legislature of Virginia gave us only one responsibility tonight and that one responsibility is to take a look at our comprehensive plan and decide whether or not it’s in accord, this proposal is in accord with our comprehensive plan, substantially in accord. I don’t know what substantially means, it’s an open word. But then they added at the end “or part thereof”, so who knows where you pick the answer. But the question before us is not about view, the question is, does this proposal match up with what we say in our comprehensive plan. And Mrs. Bragg went through a nice description of where we are in this policy. I think this project does substantially, is in substantial accord with our comprehensive plan, except for that parcel of land between White Hill and Churchmans. I think that parcel of land is not substantially in accord. That’s where I am at this point.”

Mrs. Shiflett stated: “I agree with Tom. I think it is substantially in agreement. At the time the comprehensive plan was written and revised multiple times, we didn’t even know anything about solar at that time. Only the last revision when we were trying to make some regulations for solar is the first time we had input in the comprehensive plan on solar specifically. So, some of the regulations we have put in place, some of the goals didn’t speak to renewable energy at all, cause that wasn’t on the radar screen at that time. And I think that this project is a good project. I wish it could all stay in agriculture too. I’ve been six generations in farming. I would love to have it all stay in agriculture, but the farmers that own it have decided that they don’t want it in agriculture. They want it in something else. It could be houses. We could be looking at all of those houses. I think the solar project tops that by a good bit. I don’t see any, I don’t see the advantage to having more traffic and more schools and more taxes. I really don’t. The solar panels that I have seen are not, are not ugly. Now you can disagree. We can disagree, fine, but I don’t see them as being that ugly. They’re something we get used to just like we did cell towers and other things that we’ve had to get used to because we want modern conveniences. We want electricity, we want power and the state and federal government are saying we’ve got to have renewable. It’s got to go somewhere. Everybody’s going to say no. Every place you try to put it they’re going to say no. I think it’s in substantial accord.”

Mr. Leonard stated “It is easy for people who have no vested interest in this county to view us differently than we view ourselves. The purpose that they’re here, everybody knows the purpose of them coming into the county. It’s not in any way to improve anything in the county. It is strictly monetary gain and that’s their business. In the county we view

it differently. It's changed. Change is not always good change. Change upsets a lot of people. Generally, the only people that it doesn't upset are the ones that gain from it. So, it's difficult for all of us to see that and address it. Everyone here that all but two are directly affected by this were opposed to it. The fact that these are my constituents and my neighbors makes it extremely tough on me because I can empathize with them. I am a farmer myself. I realize like everyone else here that solar is probably inevitable. It's something that's been mandated. It's going to come. The extent of this project is one that I didn't think would happen this soon and in such a populated area. I think there are areas in the county that would be better suited or possibly better suited. You know the location as everyone here has expressed, there is a certain part of this that of this property that shouldn't be in here where we want housing and we have the infrastructure. That's where we made the investment that the comp plan calls for. This is not in accord with the comp plan. The character, everybody included the comp plan talks about the importance of ag. This is for this community that we're talking about, Stuarts Draft, this is a substantial part of their community and it will change. The businesses, the farmers, it will change the ag and different areas too because once you take this part of the farmland out of circulation you know, these people still have to make a living farming. They're not going to do that on less ground, they've got to find land to farm and how do they do that. They're going to have to fight and pay more and take it to somebody else. So, this trickle-down effect on the farming community, the character of it doesn't appeal to me. As I said the extent of it. You know it is a large area. As the developers have said, it's not like what they deal with east of the Blue Ridge. The visual impact is much more difficult to hide. What we see now is pristine and once you take that away it doesn't come back, and it doesn't fit well with the community, the people that we've heard from, so I don't think the extent is meets the purpose of the comp plan either so that reason I would, don't think it's in substantial accord with our comp plan as written. It's easy for somebody outside the community to come up with reasons why it is but, in this community, I think we look a little differently at it."

Mr. Campbell stated "The project I think some of my colleagues have made an interesting point that we're charged with in this process, and I do understand that. The eleven policies that were adopted back late last summer, early fall, I think give us a little bit more guidance on doing that. I think in the absence of those I may have a different opinion about it. I guess for example policy two talks about the view sheds. I grew up in this area, probably within a quarter mile where the project is, is proposed. Don't live there anymore, but spent a good bit of time in that area. The topography is unique, that part of the county. And when I look at the number of folks that came out tonight and spoke to what their understanding of the comp plan was before projects like this were contemplated on what's being proposed. When I consider those eleven policies it's very clear to me that the people in this community are not in favor of this. The comp plan is driven by input from those in our community. The community belongs to the citizens that live there. And so, I listen to everyone speak tonight and review those eleven policies that were updates and added guidance in my mind to this body of how we're to consider these things. The voices tonight became very clear to me how this community feels about it. I do think there's significant challenges in obtaining a no impact or a little impact or minimal impact. Even to the view shed in this area, it's just too challenging with the topography and the agriculture that's in this area. There's a lot of residential around it. There are just some challenges I'm not

sure that can get me comfortable that we have satisfied this to the extent that we could certify what were charged with. So, I think at this point I can't support."

Mr. Thomas stated, "I guess that's the difficulty in trying to interpret a policy. I would say that it does meet the requirements, but I could also say you could make an argument that it doesn't. There's a lot of opinion here. The issue that I understand everybody doesn't like what the neighbor does and what they build but one key component here is it is the person that owns the land wants this and if we get down a road, if we go down a road that everybody that whatever the neighbors don't like or like, or the whole community as a whole it ruins the land rights of everybody. Right now, a lot of people don't like this solar project but down the line someone else who's opposing this might decide that they want to build something and everybody else doesn't want them to build it and we're right back here again. I'm going to make a motion that we approve this."

Mrs. Tate spoke, "Just for clarification purposes, your motion, I believe, would be that this project is in substantial accord with the comprehensive plan and you'd like to pass that along to the board."

Mrs. Shifflett seconded the motion.

Mr. Howdyshell stated, "This is a very tough decision. I don't know if it's in substantial compliance with our comp plan or in part. I sympathize with the community around. I think the biggest problem they had they built this thing in a bowl. You can see it from everywhere. And how they could mitigate that, I do not know. But like Mr. Thomas said the property owner, I kind of lean toward what the property owner wants. But then again if you don't have good neighbors, you're on an uphill battle to start with. And what I'm hearing, the neighbors are not much in favor of this. But like I say, it's a tough job. And being a farmer myself, I don't see anybody running a race to get into farming. It's a sad deal. You know, I think the national census some years back, the average of the farmer was towards 60 years of age. Young people are not coming. The work is hard. It's not an eight-hour day. You don't have health insurance. You don't have somebody pay you Social Security. There's a whole list of things that are on your shoulders, not your employer, from farming. It's a tough business, but I understand that the farming feed a lot of companies that supply goods and supplies. That's a very unique thing about Augusta County and Rockingham. I put them in the vote, they were one, we're two. We have two major cities, Rockingham has one and seven towns. But between 70-80,000 people, but agriculture's number one. They've learned to get along and that's what I'm hearing from you people. You want agriculture to stay and you're going to get along with it. You're not going to complain when the manure spreader goes down the road and he drops a little manure on the road, you're not going to call somebody and tell them to get after them, or if it smells a little bit, you know you're not going to call and complain about it. Somebody weens some calves and the cows bawl all night long, you're not going to complain about it. That's what I'm hearing. You love agriculture and want it to stay agriculture. You know some of the things I was thinking that they would address I read through that whole book. You want some reading, put you to sleep or you got to lay it down every once in awhile and pick it back up. There's a lot of good information in there. I didn't realize one of the things I didn't like. It's not an American product. They go outside of U.S. products to get a product that's not toxic. It's like they say whether you like solar, don't like solar. I think I don't believe it's substantially in accordance with our comp plan but partially. This makes

for a hard nut for me to crack. I spoke to the farmer that used to farm that ground a couple years ago. I heard comments about it wasn't very good soil. He said it was very good soil. He enjoyed farming it. Even won some soybean state awards on that farm ground. But it got a little pricey. We have to make a decision whether they want to keep it farming or solar or if you reject the solar it's probably going to be house and that's the cold hard facts. That's what the gentleman told me. If it don't get solar, he's going to develop it. You're going to have rooftops, we'll have flooded schools. You got more road, more traffic on the road. So, I'm kind of betwixt and between. But I do not think it is the right area because it does set in a bowl and everybody can see it. No, I'm not going to be in favor of this project."

Mr. Jennings asked if the "first and the second agree to an amendment to remove the parcel the Service Authority asked us not to include between Whitehill and Churchmans Mill."

Mr. Thomas stated that it was his "understanding that the project is not feasible while taking out that 10% chunk."

Mr. Jennings stated, "I would amend the motion that's on the floor to remove the parcel between White Hill and Churchmans Mill Road from the substantial accord approval."

Mrs. Shiflett seconded the motion.

Mrs. Tate stated that the amended motion is that it is in substantial accord with the comprehensive plan all the property on the other side of Churchmans Mill Road but the portion between Churchmans Mill Road and Whitehill Road is not in compliance with the comprehensive plan."

The amendment was voted on and was denied with a 5 to 2 vote.

Going back to the original motion that was made by Mr. Thomas to approve the entire area as being in substantial accord with the comprehensive plan. With a 4 to 3 vote the motion was denied.

New Business

Mrs. Tate informed everyone of the proposed Meeting Schedule and Inclement Weather Resolution for 2021.

Mrs. Shiflett made a motion to approve the schedule.

Mrs. Bragg seconded the motion which carried unanimously.

Staff Reports

Mrs. Tate reviewed with the Planning Commission the upcoming items on the agenda for the February meeting of the Board of Zoning Appeals. Mr. Leonard made the

recommendation that the BZA consider the acreage of the parcel for the request by Todd Fretwell, agent for Fairfield-Echols, for a Variance from the rear setback in order to construct a new building on property owned by Fishersville Realty, LLC, located at 85 Construction Lane, Fishersville in the Beverley Manor District.

Mrs. Tate reviewed the 2020 Planning Commission Annual Report.

Mr. Campbell made a motion to approve the report.

A second was made by Mrs. Bragg with the motion being carried unanimously.

Adjournment

With there being nothing else to discuss, Mr. Howdysshell closed the meeting.

Chairman

Secretary