

Howard County Solar Task Force Meeting – 3/3/2020

Minutes and Action Items

Attendees

Members: Jamie Brown; Cathy Hudson; Kevin Lucas; Franny Yuhas; Daniel Jacobs; Keith Ohlinger; Leah Miller; James Zoller; Joy Levy; John Dove; Kelly Hensing; Amy Gowan; Corey Ramsden

Guests: Patrick Boddicker, Ted Mariani

Approval of Minutes

- Revised minutes for 2/4/2020 were approved.
- Minutes for 2/18/2020 were approved with one change: Change language to: 75 additional properties are dedicated easements.

Presentation

There was no formal presentation at this meeting. The topic was conditional use parameters. Planning and Zoning provided several handouts outlining conditional use permit policy and answered questions.

Discussion and Questions

Business Plan: For applications to the ALPB, the task force suggested a business plan or projections from the farm be submitted that shows how solar fits into the business plan for the farm and how it will support the farm financially, as well as showing that solar will be an ancillary use. A 20-year business plan was suggested, with updates at 5- or 10-year intervals. Policy will need to clearly articulate what should be included in the business plan.

Benefits of Solar to New Farmers: Including 10-20 acres of solar on a larger farm can help new or younger farmers to purchase property and actively farm it. Dan provided an example that he would like to purchase property for farming but cannot make that work financially without putting some of the property into solar.

Solar without conditional use permit: Task Force considered whether there should be exceptions when commercial solar facilities may be installed without an application for conditional use and determined that no, the rules should remain as they are for when conditional use permits are required for a commercial solar facility (CSF).

Draft recommendations: The Task Force reviewed and discussed a summary of draft recommendations made by the group to date and provided edits and other suggestions for additional research needed to finalize the recommendations.

Follow up on Previous Action Items:

Joy provided a summary of her research into other counties' policies on CSF on agricultural preservation land. Several counties don't have a local agricultural preservation program. Out of the counties that do have agricultural preservation programs and that Joy was able to confirm with prior to the meeting, none of them allow commercial solar on agricultural preservation land. Montgomery County is currently considering opening up the agricultural reserve to commercial solar.

New Action Items

- Ask ALPB to develop what should be included in a business plan that shows what farming operations are planned, how the CSF is an ancillary use of the farm, and how the CSF supports the farm financially. (Cathy and Jamie)
- Link to podcast of interest will be shared (James)
- Additional examples of solar project sizes (in MW DC) and approximate associate acreage ranges are needed. (Corey)

Public Hearing

The Solar Task Force will take public testimony at a hearing on 4/14/20 from 7:00pm-8:45pm in the Belmont Meeting Room at the Elkridge Branch Library. Unless we are still fighting the COVID-19 pandemic, in which case alternative arrangements will be made.