

Energix withdraws second solar farm proposal in Franklin County due to public outcry

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Concerned citizens packed into the meeting room of the Franklin County Government Center in Rocky Mount on Thursday to hear a proposal by Mountain Brook Solar to construct a 20-megawatt solar facility in Wirtz.

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Energix Renewables announced earlier this week it is withdrawing plans to construct a solar farm in the Wirtz area of Franklin County following significant negative feedback from the community.

The 20 megawatt solar farm, known as Mountain Brook Solar, was first proposed to the public earlier this year. Plans were for 92 acres of solar panels to be located on three parcels of property totaling 258 acres located at the intersections of Brooks Mill and Burnt Chimney roads.

Elianna Ginis, project developer, sent a letter to Franklin County on May 2 to announce Energix Renewables would be withdrawing its application for the solar farm. “Mountain Brook Solar has taken feedback from the Franklin County Planning Commission and the community and will resubmit a special use permit application for the project that aligns with this feedback,” she wrote in the letter.

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Franklin County began informing neighboring residents of the proposed farm earlier this week of Energix Renewables’ decision to withdraw its application.

Mountain Brook Solar received little support from the community during two community meetings held by Energix Renewables earlier this year. At last month’s Franklin County Planning Commission meeting, members voted 7-0 to recommend denial for the solar farm following a public hearing where 25 people spoke out against the project.

Most who spoke out during the public hearing, as well as the two community meetings, were concerned the solar farm could impact home values nearby. There were also fears that materials from the solar panels could leak into groundwater.

Another concern was recent reports that Energix Renewables had faced fines in Henry County and Wytheville from the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality. The violations included administrative matters as well as some instances of muddy runoff at construction sites.

This will be the second solar farm Energix Renewables has proposed in Franklin County that was later withdrawn. In 2021, a proposed solar farm on 220 acres in Westlake was scrapped after public criticism citing the location would be best suited for residential housing.

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