

Dinwiddie rejects solar project agreement

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By Zach Armstrong

DINWIDDIE, Va -- The Dinwiddie Board of Supervisors disapproved a rezoning agreement for a solar farm preventing what would have been a subsequent siting agreement and a conditional use permit for the project from also being approved.

Lily Pond Solar, a wholly owned subsidiary of Energix US, is proposing to design, construct and operate an 80-megawatt alternating current solar photovoltaic ground mounted electric generation project.

The project would consist of 14 tax parcels with the solar panels sited on approximately 600 acres. The remainder of the property would include approximately 500 acres of conservation areas for buffers, setbacks, wildlife corridors, natural habitat, pollinator garden and battlefield preservation. Most of the properties will be under long-term leases with some parcels providing right of way easements for electric collection/transmission lines.

For the project, the company had requested to rezone properties containing approximately 1,064 acres of land from A-2, Agricultural General, to SED, Utility Scale Solar Energy District which would allow for solar energy projects pursuant to the Zoning Ordinance allowed density.

The properties are generally located in the area on the west side of Halifax Road bordered on the south by Brick Road and also including property on the east and west sides of Brick Road bordered on the east by Halifax Road extending down to Carson Road.

As indicated in the Dinwiddie County Comprehensive Land Use Plan, the subject property is located within the Rural Conservation Area, which allows limited industrial, service and utility uses for the area.

The company's fiscal impact report on the project identified a fiscal contribution to the County of \$99,000.00 in rollback property taxes if the project is removed from the County's land use program and additional local real estate property tax revenue totaling \$2.82 million over the 45-year lifetime of the project.

The project would be subject to machinery and tools tax and the M&T revenue is estimated to be approximately \$3,811,822 over 45 years. The revenue share option that assesses up to \$1,400.00 per megawatt of solar project capacity with an escalator of 10% every five years beginning in 2026 creates revenues of approximately \$7.6 million over 45 years. According to the report, the economic contribution will generate approximately \$6.5 million in direct (construction related activity), indirect, and induced incremental activity to the economy in Dinwiddie County.

Jim Martin from Energix spoke saying "we're here as guests in this community and we have been working for 4 years to earn the right to become neighbors. So we're here humbly requesting 3 things and two things keep coming to mind of what people are worried about and I'm here to talk about why that's not true ... the loss of rural and agricultural character is what's on everyone's mind tonight,"

Martin went on to point out the company has removed 900 acres due to concerns from the battlefield trust and from the hunt club, removed access to Fog Lake Road and Lily Pond Lane, agreed to preserve land in perpetuity so that is preserved, create wildlife quarters, created discrete fence areas where solar panels will be and areas where wildlife will cross and hunt clubs will continue to hunt.

One resident during the public hearing stated "I am in support of all three elements based on my travels. Every summer I travel out west to California and back and the further West I get, the more solar farms I see. Where I see the most renewable energy is on the east coast and in Virginia. I'm going to have a great-grandson and I think these projects are going to affect their life. I don't see why we have to wrap it up in 45 years, we should continue to upgrade it,"

Another resident who spoke stated "solar people want to border our northwest corner, I'm not happy about that. They were talking about setbacks but not setbacks on adjoining landowners, there's 25 feet from our fence line to theirs ... Green energy is being pushed like crazy from the left-wing. They talk about all these places that are demanding renewable energy but why aren't these people putting solar fields around them, not us. It's a shame to take good land and clear it to make a solar field when we have plenty of land already cleared to put a solar field on."

The supervisors made comments expressing what their personal concerns and objections to the solar project were.

"I have a new grandbaby in the hospital and so this future is for her and really not me, but I can't get past how solar is green energy when you take productive farmland and turn it into solar panels," said Supervisor Daniel Lee. "The future I believe in global warming but weather is weather and weather has changed from the beginning of time to now ... The fact of the matter is 45 years from now in Dinwiddie, I don't want to see us taking down solar panels. I want to continue the rural character of this county,"

"We need to protect natural resources in the county and as we lose those natural resources, we lose a lot and all wealth grows out of natural resources and if you don't control those you don't control the essentials to control life," said Supervisor Harrison Moody.

"What we vote on tonight will set a precedent for the next 100 years, not just the next 45." said Supervisor Mark Moore. "This country does need renewable energy, but I don't know this is the spot for it. 75% of this property is rural integrity of Dinwiddie County. It comes down to a philosophy: Do you believe in agriculture or do you want renewable energy in this particular spot? My disagreement is as we go forward, this is just case number one. Whos the next neighbor who gets knock on the door to say your the next solar farm you're looking for?,"

Chairman of the Board Ebron-Brenda Bonner stated during her comment that “we’ve had half and half for and against solar and we have to move on and look at the rural heritage of the county. I’ve talked to a lot of people and they have talked about the rural character of county, not saying solar will never be part of it but at this time we have to look at not moving forward with it at this time,”