

AT A MEETING OF THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION AT 7:00PM ON MARCH 9, 2016 IN BOARD ROOM, COUNTY GOVERNMENT CENTER, 755 ROANOKE STREET, CHRISTIANSBURG, VIRGINIA:

I. CALL TO ORDER:

Mr. Miller, Chair, called the meeting to order.

II. DETERMINATION OF A QUORUM:

Mr. Allen established the presence of a quorum.

Present: Bob Miller, Chair
 Scott Kroll, Vice-Chair
 Coy Allen, Secretary
 Steve Howard, Member
 Trey Wolz, Member
 Chris Tuck, Board of Supervisors Liaison
 Emily Gibson, Planning Director
 Dari Jenkins, Planning and Zoning Administrator
 Brea Hopkins, Development Planner
 Candace Ross, Sr. Program Assistant

Absent: Sonia Hirt, Member
 Cindy W. Disney, Member
 Bryan Katz, Member
 Bryan Rice, Member

III. APPROVAL OF AGENDA:

On a motion by Mr. Wolz, and seconded by Mr. Howard and unanimously carried, the agenda was approved.

IV. APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA:

On a motion by Mr. Kroll and seconded by Mr. Allen, and unanimously carried, the consent agenda was approved.

V. PUBLIC ADDRESS:

Mr. Miller opened the public address.

There being no comments the public address was closed.

VI. NEW BUSINESS:

Solar Ordinance Discussion

Mrs. Gibson introduced the guests with industry perspectives on solar power and stated they were available to answer questions from the commission.

Nathan Rogers, with Exoplexus, explained the background of his company and projects that have been completed recently. Mr. Rogers described how solar farms work and their characteristics. He also shared pictures of the different components related to solar farms.

James Martin, with Martin Energy, gave a brief overview of solar and what drives the energy locally in Virginia. He stated that his company is the largest manufacturer of solar panels and they also construct and operate solar farms while working closely with utilities. Mr. Martin also explained costs, site characteristics, financing and ideal locations for solar farms.

Pat Bixler with Baseline Solar, locally operated, stated he primarily installs small commercial and residential systems. Mr. Bixler explained how low maintenance solar panels are once they are installed. He also mentioned he has noticed more interest in solar farms from local land owners. Mr. Bixler advised the board not to just focus on utilities when considering revisions to the ordinance.

There was discussion between the commission and the speakers pertaining to permit requirements, slope of land and acreage threshold for solar farms.

Mr. Miller asked if staff knew how many substations were in the county, since it is ideal for solar farms to be no further than two miles from one.

Mrs. Gibson said she knew of at least five, but staff can look into it further to find out exactly how many are in the county.

Mrs. Gibson asked the speakers if any concerns had ever been brought to their attention by adjoining property owners, such as glare from the array.

Mr. Rogers stated that the only concerns he has encountered was the appearance of the solar farm itself, landscaping, and fencing.

Mrs. Hopkins opened discussion about the county's current solar energy ordinance and changes to potentially allow solar as a principal use. She briefed the commission on the five acre solar farm project at New River Valley Medical Center. She stated currently, solar panels are considered accessory use only, that includes roof mount panels and ground mount panels that must meet the same setbacks as accessory structures. Mrs. Hopkins said staff attempted to define solar energy in three categories; smaller scale, larger scale and utility scale. She explained the difference between the categories and also referred to a slide that listed the zoning districts in the county and, depending on the size, if they would be allowed by right, SUP or not at all. Mrs. Hopkins asked the members for any suggestions and feedback.

Mr. Miller asked about the technology for the panels.

Mr. Martin and Mr. Bixler stated that advances are happening incrementally.

Mr. Kroll asked if the current districts and location of substations considered with the staff's proposal.

Mrs. Hopkins said the districts were looked at but not the proximity of existing substations. She added that will be considered with the revisions.

Discussion was held about impervious surfaces and ideas of increasing utility scale to more than ten acres which would also increase large sale.

Staff stated they will make revisions with the feedback received from the commission together with the guest speakers and present in a future meeting.

VII. OLD BUSINESS:

Updated 2016 Work Plan

Mrs. Gibson said staff revised the work plan and will be updating the commission quarterly throughout the year. She stated the annual report and the work plan will go to the Board of Supervisors this week and will be presented by Mr. Miller after the budget is approved.

VIII. LIAISON REPORTS:

Board of Supervisors: Mr. Tuck stated Craig Meadows presented his budget to the board that included increase spending for schools, fire and safety. He also stated that the old Blacksburg Middle School and High School are still a top priority for the board.

Blacksburg Planning Commission: No report

Christiansburg Planning Commission: No report

Economic Development Committee: Mr. Kroll said there was a presentation by Virginia Economic Development Partnership.

Public Service Authority: Mr. Howard attended the March 7th meeting. There were updates on recent water breaks and discussion on bonuses for workers that were out in the inclement weather.

Parks & Recreation: No report

Radford Planning Commission: No report

School Board: No report

Tourism Council: No report

Planning Director's Report: Mrs. Gibson stated the agriculture subcommittee has met once so far, and staff will be reaching out to committee members for the next meeting. She reminded the commission to notify staff if they would like to attend the Annual Planning Commissioner's Training Dinner that will be held on April 21st. Mrs. Gibson gave an update on the safe routes to school project; once the design is complete, she will provide a copy to the commission. Referring to an article published in the News Messenger, Mrs. Gibson assured the board that with Clarence Road possibly qualifying for funding that would not take away from other roads in need of repair. She also gave updates on Hogan's Retreat and Passenger Rail projects. Mrs. Gibson mentioned that she will update the commission on the General Assembly and that the proposed 2017 budget is available online. She concluded by updating the commission on the status of the AEP Special Use Permit that will go before the Board of Supervisors for approval during their next meeting held on March 14.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:51 p.m.

Chairman

Secretary