

March 1, 2022
Regular Meeting

**Pittsylvania County Planning Commission
Regular Meeting
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VIRGINIA: The Regular Meeting of the Pittsylvania County Planning Commission was held on March 1, 2022, in the Board Meeting Room, 39 Bank Street, SE, Chatham, Virginia. Chairman - Westover District H.F. Haymore, called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM. The following members were present:

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
H.F. Haymore	Chairman - Westover District	Present	6:38 PM
Nathan Harker	Vice Chairman - Staunton River District	Present	6:32 PM
Colette Henderson	Member - Banister District	Present	6:29 PM
Janet Mease	Member - Callands-Gretna District	Present	6:30 PM
Brian K. Horne	Member - Dan River District	Present	6:30 PM
Gary Oakes	Member - Tunstall District	Absent	
Richard Waters	Member - Chatham-Blairs District	Present	6:31 PM
Darrell Dalton	Board of Supervisors Rep	Present	6:36 PM

HEARING OF CITIZENS

No citizens came forward to speak.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

A motion was made by Mr. Horne, seconded by Mr. Waters, and by a seven (7) to zero (0) vote, the agenda was approved as presented.

RESULT:	ADOPTED [UNANIMOUS]
MOVER:	Brian K. Horne, Member - Dan River District
SECONDER:	Richard Waters, Member - Chatham-Blairs District
AYES:	Haymore, Harker, Henderson, Mease, Horne, Waters, Dalton
ABSENT:	Oakes

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. PC Minutes 02_01_2022

A motion was made by Mrs. Mease, seconded by Mrs. Henderson, and by a seven (7) to zero (0) vote, the minutes were approved as presented.

RESULT:	APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]
MOVER:	Janet Mease, Member - Callands-Gretna District
SECONDER:	Colette Henderson, Member - Banister District
AYES:	Haymore, Harker, Henderson, Mease, Horne, Waters, Dalton
ABSENT:	Oakes

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

There was no Chairman's report.

PUBLIC HEARING

1. Public Hearing: Case R-22-007; Barry and Jeanette Haskins; Rezoning from R-1, Residential Suburban Subdivision District, to A-1, Agricultural District (Mease)

Mr. Haymore opened the public hearing at 7:03 p.m. Mrs. Ragsdale, Director of Community Development, reported that Barry and Jeanette Haskins petitioned to rezone 1.48 acres, on Weal Road, in the Callands-Gretna Election District, to allow for placement of an accessory building. Barry Haskins was present to represent the petition. There was no opposition to the petition. Mr. Haymore closed the public hearing at 7:04 p.m. A motion was made by Mrs. Mease, seconded by Mr. Harker, to recommend the Board of Supervisors grant the rezoning request. Motion passed by a seven (7) to zero (0) vote.

RESULT:	APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]
MOVER:	Janet Mease, Member - Callands-Gretna District
SECONDER:	Nathan Harker, Vice Chairman - Staunton River District
AYES:	Haymore, Harker, Henderson, Mease, Horne, Waters, Dalton
ABSENT:	Oakes

2. Public Hearing: Case R-22-010; Mark Blanchett; Rezoning from RRC-1, Residential Combined Suburban Subdivision District, to A-1, Agricultural District (Oakes)

Mr. Haymore opened the public hearing at 7:05 p.m. Mrs. Ragsdale, Director of Community Development, reported that Mark Blanchet petitioned to rezone 19.76 acres, at 16588 & 16596 Martinsville Hwy., in the Tunstall Election District, to allow for a campground. Mark Blanchet was present to represent the petition. He stated he purchased the property three (3) months ago and is getting into compliance with the Virginia Department of Health. Mr. Blanchet gets numerous calls each day from workers coming to our area looking for a campground. There was no opposition to the petition. Mr. Haymore closed the public hearing at 7:08 p.m. A motion was made by Mrs. Mease, seconded by Mr. Dalton, to recommend the Board of Supervisors grant the rezoning request. Motion passed by a seven (7) to zero (0) vote.

RESULT:	APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]
MOVER:	Janet Mease, Member - Callands-Gretna District
SECONDER:	Darrell Dalton, Board of Supervisors Rep
AYES:	Haymore, Harker, Henderson, Mease, Horne, Waters, Dalton
ABSENT:	Oakes

3. Case S-22-003 Firefly Solar, LLC; Special Use Permit for a Utility Scale Solar Energy Facility (Horne)

Mr. Haymore opened the public hearing at 7:09 p.m. Mrs. Ragsdale, Director of Community Development, reported that Firefly Energy, LLC., petitioned for a Special Use Permit on 3,791.95 acres, (19 parcels of land) located off State Road 58/South Boston Highway, State Road 713/Rock Springs Road, State Road 712/White Ridge Road, State Road 62/Milton Highway, State Road 899/Cardwell Lane, State Road 656/Kerns Church Road, and State Road 970/Pounds Road, in the

Dan River Election District. Jayce Walker, Development Manager with Firefly Energy, LLC., was present to represent the petition. He stated that the project adheres to, and in places now goes beyond, county requirements for vegetative buffering, property line setbacks and community engagement. He stated that thirty citizens signed in at the January meeting held at the Ringgold Volunteer Fire Department and discussions were held regarding the project. Mr. Walker also stated that Firefly Energy LLC has worked further with the citizens of the Ringgold Community by sending out another round of invitations to an open house held Thursday, February 24, 2022 and had twenty-two attendees at that meeting. Project information packets were sent out to every neighbor of the project for those that were unable to attend. Mr. Walker also stated that during this time, Firefly Energy LLC has responded to e-mails, phone calls and text messages and even visited with neighbors in their homes to better understand their concerns and make accommodations. He stated that they are making numerous adjustments to the site plan at the expense of the project including moving proposed panels, inverters, and access routes away from concerned neighbors. Mr. Walker stated that they are seeking to permit 3,000 acres for this project, but after the acreage that is used only for collection lines, property setbacks, and unsuitable land is removed, the acreage will be about 1,470 acres. He said that the current design only calls for 1,400 acres. Mr. Walker stated that Firefly Energy LLC will provide approximately 12.25 million dollars in payment to the county over its operation, with an additional 3.5 million dollars in real tax revenue over its lifespan. He said that if the properties were to remain in their current use, they would generate an anticipated \$319,000 over the span of 35 years, creating an increase in revenue for the county that is 49 times that amount. He also said that Firefly Energy LLC will generate clean energy for up to 25,000 homes in a year, that once injected into the transmission grid, will disperse throughout the electrical system and empower homes and businesses in Ringgold, Pittsylvania County, and beyond. This clean energy is a requirement for many companies such as Ford and Amazon in choosing new facilities so Pittsylvania County will not only benefit directly from Firefly's economic contribution but will continue evolving its economy, attracting next generation businesses, and creating more jobs. Mr. Haymore asked if more of the electricity would be going to North Carolina than Virginia? Mr. Walker stated that they will be interconnecting onto a high-voltage 230 kilovolt transmission line. He compared this to Route 40, stating that electricity follows the path of least resistance, so it is possible that they will inject this energy onto that transmission line, and no one nearby needs it, but at that given moment in time the closest location that it needs to be used is in North Carolina. He stated that they are constructing this project and then selling it to Appalachian Power to serve their customer base here in Virginia. Mr. Horne asked if Appalachian purchased the entire project. Mr. Walker stated they did purchase the entire project. A number of citizens signed up to speak. The first was Larry Burnett who approves of the project. He said that no one is against solar energy, just its location. He stated that it's the cleanest, quietest, safest form of energy on the planet and that Firefly has gone above and beyond any county requirements to accommodate the concerns of neighbors to this project. Mr. Burnett also stated that Firefly has made many adjustments to the original plans, such as moving transmission lines further away from homes, doing away with panels bordering Highway 62 and across the road from Maya Lane. He stated that they have also moved the primary access point to the project so it should have very little to no impact on Highway 899. He stated that people do not want the scenery around them to change. Mr. Burnett said that the solar panels will make no noise, no odor, and do not increase traffic. He said that he knows there are lots of people at the meeting that will speak against this project for one reason or another, but that for each one of these people there are a lot more hoping that this will happen because of the income it will bring, it will also generate tax benefits for all taxpayers. Rhonda Guthrie from

Halifax County was next to speak. She stated that her property is surrounded by a solar project and that her property value has decreased by 10 or 15 percent due to the solar project. She stated she surveyed 100 people and asked if they would buy property adjacent to a large solar project and all but 2 or 3 answered no. Ms. Guthrie said that the project construction lasted over a year, was very impactful. Doris Farmer was next to speak. She stated that she thinks the project is good for our area. Skylar Zunk spoke next, stating that he was there on behalf of the Virginia Land and Liberty Coalition, a project of conservatives for clean energy. He stated that they ardently support private property rights and an individual's right to do on their property what they please but being respectful of all neighbors. He said that the Firefly project is going above and beyond some aspects of what is required of solar projects. John Walters was next to speak, stating that he met with Mr. Walker on February 3rd at Mrs. Bass's home. Mr. Walters stated that he asked a lot of questions and all of them were not answered to his satisfaction. He asked how this project would benefit him and the answer was, it may lower his taxes. He stated that he is concerned that Cardwell Lane will not be maintained properly. He also stated that there are dangerous chemicals that are made in the photovoltaic cells and he knows they can leak and possibly contaminate groundwater. Ginny Walker spoke next, stating that she could not be told at the meeting last week how close the panels would be to her farm and that if they could move them away from her farm that would be a wonderful thing. Josh Burnett was next to speak, stating that this project has a locally sourced energy that will provide our community with a sustainable, renewable source for energy with local jobs to build and maintain it. Larry Jackson with American Power spoke next, in favor of the Firefly project. Mr. Jackson stated that American Power intends on purchasing the project from Recurrent Energy. Appalachian Power currently serves over 2,000 customers in the Northwest area of the county, a large number of industrial customers around Danville and soon will complete a 138-kilovolt transmission line and substation to serve the Berry Hill Mega Park. Mr. Jackson stated that upon completion of the Firefly project, Appalachian Power will have three full-time employees on the project every day. Next to speak was Denise Sheffield, she stated that Appalachian Power serves West Virginia, Tennessee, and Virginia, not our area. She said this project will not financially help with our budget; it will only benefit the landowners and the solar development company. Contamination of soil and groundwater were other concerns. She stated that she has asked Mr. Walker the same questions and has gotten the vague answers. She stated that she has asked how many solar panels will be on this 165-acre area and he wouldn't answer. She said that she kept asking and he finally answered 1,000. Ray Sheffield was next to speak, stating that this project will be one huge mess that someone will have to clean up. He said it will ruin everything nearby. Mr. Walker came back to make final comments. He offered to work with people individually. He stated that there will be a temporary construction period and they are wholly responsible for containing that construction period and ensuring that it goes as smoothly and seamlessly as possible. He thanked the residents that spoke for their feedback and stated that he will make himself available for phone calls. Mr. Waters asked what is the time limit or time frame for construction the project? Mr. Walker stated that construction will begin at the earliest on January 1, 2023 and estimated to take between 12 - 15 months. He also stated that the project should be in operation by spring or mid-2024. Mr. Haymore asked about the garbage that residents spoke about. Mr. Walker says that contractors will be held accountable, and they expect no less from engineering, procurement, and construction companies that are selected to build this project. Mr. Waters asked if there would be someone on site daily if issues arise that residents can call or contact? Mr. Walker stated that there would be folks in charge of the project that would be present on a daily basis, and signage will be posted on how and who to contact during the construction

phase. Mrs. Mease asked about a maintenance operator to make sure after completion of the job that the project will be properly maintained. Mr. Walker said that Appalachian Power will have an operations and maintenance agreement will have 3 folks to operate the project. He stated that they will be responsible for the interior as well as the exterior of the project. Mr. Haymore closed the public hearing at 7:48 p.m. Mrs. Ragsdale stated that Firefly did request two amendments to their conditions at the Planning Commission meeting in March. Those were changes to the height restriction, excluding pole mounted utility lines, and the training requirement for the local fire department, requiring quarterly general training relating to solar projects, since they will not have battery storage. She stated that these requests were not reflected in the staff summary. Mr. Horne made the motion that those two amendments to the conditions are accepted, seconded by Mr. Harker. Mr. Horne thanked the citizens, and Firefly for the additional month to answer concerns from the citizens. He stated that he felt that part of his responsibility as commissioner is to justify, to hear, to consider the concerns of the citizens in the Dan River District. As the Planning Commission, they are to consider what's best for the citizens of the entire county some 60 some thousand citizens as well as the county itself. Mr. Horne stated that Planning Commission can only suggest approval, they are a recommending body that do not make the final decisions, the Board of Supervisors make the final ruling on zoning issues, the Board of Zoning Appeals will have the final ruling on Special Use permit applications. He stated that both parties can and have overturned Planning Commission suggestions in the past, both ways, so he just wants everyone to be aware of that. He also said that A-1 Agricultural zoning is a very liberal zoning. Many things can be done on Agricultural land, a hog farm, or a poultry farm could be placed on this land, or a fertilizer plant could be constructed like in Winston Salem, NC. He stated that the storage facility caught fire a month or so ago and every homeowner and every business within a five-mile radius of that facility as well as a University in Chapel Hill, NC had to be evacuated, so we could be listening to a lot worse options than solar. Mr. Horne stated that we are the largest county in the state of Virginia, but we do not rank in the Top 25 agriculturally. He stated that there is no money in farming and we as a county are not progressing. He also stated that we don't have enough to offer our young people. As soon as they get educated, they leave, they are gone. Mr. Horne said that we need green, renewable energy to attract companies that do not want to leave a carbon footprint. He also stated that he thinks that this project will benefit the county in that it's going to create an atmosphere conducive to letting other industry and technical type businesses to come here to maybe help entice our young people to stay. Mr. Horne said that from a revenue standpoint, 15.2 million dollars is a lot of money that can be added back into the budget and each of the 60,000 some citizens in the county could benefit in the way of tax relief. Mr. Horne made a recommendation that this application for a Special Use permit with the conditions set forth by the office of Community Development, along with the amendments requested by Firefly Energy LLC be approved. The motion was seconded by Mrs. Mease. Mrs. Mease added that we cannot deny that this solar company has not tried to make every effort to meet with the community to try to resolve some of the issues. She stated you cannot please everybody, the only way you can control what goes on bedside of your property is to buy the property and we all know that we can't do that. Motion passed by a seven (7) to zero (0) vote.

Mr. H.F. Haymore, Jr-Chairman

Robin S. Vaughan-Clerk