

YOUR VIEWS

Boards actions concerning

To the Editor:

My husband and I purchased a home located on Darlington Heights Road., Cullen in June 2018. I attended the Feb. 8 public hearing regarding the proposed slaughter house/meat processing facility. If passed by the Cumberland County Board of Supervisors it will be located two properties east of our home and within a residential area.

The gentleman who presented his request was business like, thorough, respectful and polite. When the board members began to speak, it seemed as if the 40 some folks that were there in opposition to the proposal along with the 201 signatures on the petition were completely irrelevant. One board

member, who spoke toward the end, commented on an alleged call she received where the caller expressed concern about the applicant being a Muslim. She went on to add how she saw this as racist and felt that everyone had a right to be a business owner. I couldn't connect how that had anything to do with what was said by the speakers that presented their concern. The room where most of us sat was about one third African American who represented Darlington Heights in opposition to this facility being located in the neighborhood. I personally never considered it being a matter of race, as when I first heard of it I had no idea who the applicant was so that statement certainly doesn't

represent me or anyone I have spoken to in our community.

I am concerned about this type of business being two properties down from my house and what negative impact that it will have on my and surrounding properties. In addition, my understanding of what one speaker suggested was trying to help the man find a place more appropriate for his business which would not only benefit him but for our neighborhood to maintain the quality of life we all appreciate and enjoy by living here. I was encouraged by his willingness to reach out and bring a solution to the situation.

It would have been encouraging if the board members would have em-

braced the idea of the applicant, the community and the board members working together to find a better solution that would not adversely impact a residential community. Instead, I felt like the comments made by one board member was intended to create division within our community and totally inappropriate. It is my belief that some members of this board are unconcerned with the wishes of the community. I hope you will consider the request from our community and not approve this applicant's request for this facility at this location.

Regards,

V. Grace Burgess
Darlington Heights

Will Buckingham County BOS get it right this time?

To the Editor:

Buckingham County has a second chance to listen to their citizens and vote no to Riverstone Solar Project.

Industrial scale plants do not belong in rural communities. Deterioration to the roads, traffic of over 450 (mostly out of state) employees at the height of construction, and danger to school children and citizens driving in the area will be a consequence.

The eminent soil erosion and harm to the streams, the Little George Creek and the James River will happen if this is approved. Apex's only

other solar project in Virginia, Campbell County, has been a nightmare for the county and the residents.

Yet the Board of Supervisors (BOS) does not feel the need to talk to Campbell County.

Numerous other large utility scale solar projects have experienced multiple detrimental issues.

Heavy equipment working seven days a week, noise pollution, and pile driving from sun up to sun down is disturbing to residents and farm animals. Other counties are living with the negative impacts. As a

consequence, they are improving and strengthening their solar policies and ordinances to help protect their citizens, environment, and their counties for the future.

Learn from the experience and hardships of others. Investigate and vote as if this was happening in your own backyard. Supervisors and Commissioners, you owe it to your citizens to do your due diligence! What's the rush? If you love Buckingham you cannot approve this project. The only winner will be the corporations. Think about the future of the

county. Utility scale solar should not be placed near creeks, rivers and in our communities. The public hearing is Feb. 28. Email comments to: publiccomments@buckinghamcountyvirginia.gov or call (434) 969-5039 and leave a voicemail three minutes or less by noon Feb. 28. Or you may speak at the meeting. Let your voice be heard.

Shelley Flood
Virginia Beach
(family property in Buckingham County for five generations)

Utility scale solar farms

The Buckingham County Planning Commission (PC) and Board of Supervisors (BOS) should be paying attention to all the recent issues counties around the Commonwealth have been having with industrial utility scale solar farms. Most recently the Mecklenburg County BOS voted against "Seven Bridges" industrial utility solar project north of Chase after public outcry for environmental degradation and continuing issues with two built solar facilities silting up creeks sending plumes of mud into Kerr Lake 10 miles away. The current Riverstone Solar project located in Northern Buckingham County will have adverse impacts to multiple streams and large creeks with confluence to the James River.

Don't repeat the same mistakes that other localities have made. The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) is supposed to police and protect our rivers, streams and environment but all DEQ does is merely fine the developers for failing to control the runoff, meanwhile permanent damage to an important and now endangered watershed is occurring. It's up to the PC and our local elected officials to listen and respect your citizens and become vocal on protecting our environment that we call home.

Beyond the fact that the Feb. 28 Joint Public Hearing with the Buckingham County PC and BOS is a result of a lawsuit against the County for improper notice and rushing to pass this project in November 2021, its equally shocking and to be honest, reckless, for the County to not have an approved (thru public hearings, process and working with consultants) Utility Scale Solar Ordinance. The County instead is using

the current project Riverstone Solar and working with the developer Apex Clean Energy to create a 'solar policy.' This is not how you develop solid planning and design ordinances that are meant to protect the residents and landowners of Buckingham County. This process is essentially letting the fox (developer) into the henhouse to develop standards and criteria that suits the developer's interest. Wrong. Look no further than Nottaway County that has tabled any solar project and is working on a solid solar ordinance and will involve strong public involvement.

One thing that Buckingham County needs to review, and change is the size and density of the current solar project and build this into a solar ordinance. At almost 2,000 acres, disturbing current timber and multiple streams and Little George Creek, the project is too large. Simply put, the site happens to be located close to high-voltage electrical transmission lines which creates significant cost savings to the industry, therefore that is one reason why the industry is focusing here. This likely won't be the last project to target these areas of transmission lines in the County—hence the issue of equity as well as the impacts to the local community and the environment. I am hopeful the PC and BOS will address the equity issue and create an ordinance that spread these facilities out to make them more equitable in the County, limit the size of any one project and lessen the overall negative impacts to any site and surrounding community.

Another significant impact of utility-scale solar is the removal of forest and agricultural land from active use. Most built or planned solar facilities



YOUR TURN

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take an existing agricultural or forestry operation out of production for more than 30 years. Such facilities should not be sited on prime agricultural and forest land (as identified by the USDA or by state agencies) and ecological sensitive lands (e.g., riparian buffers, critical habitats, hardwood forests). The least productive land should be used first to minimize the loss of productive agricultural/forested land. A recent Mecklenburg project "Grasshopper" solar facility is a lesson learned for that County. It has taken agricultural land out of commission and damaged the environment at the same time.

Another failure in many ordinances is that solar developers use the argument that agricultural use or forestry can return to the site after decommissioning, but in "Grasshopper" project and others around the Commonwealth, most of the topsoil was removed and not replaced after construction—so the site will not support any active agricultural or forestry resources in the future. Any ordinance should react and learn from this issue and ensure through further revisions, that construction activities must retain the sites' original topsoil and ensure that the decommissioning plan also addresses this issue and the likely groundwater contamination. Otherwise, the county will be

left with severely degraded sites that offer little future value to the community and continue to impact equity in the county for generations to come. You don't have to go far to talk with other counties in the Commonwealth who have already learned this valuable lesson.

In closing, utility scale solar projects in Buckingham County like the planned Riverstone project should not be so large, nor impact prime agricultural and forested areas. Nor should it adversely impact our environmentally sensitive, scenic and historical resources. Do County officials know that the proposed site is less than 1/2 mile from the waters of the beautiful James with a "scenic river" designation? We need to protect our rural cultural resources. A solar project should bring overall value to the County beyond the clean energy label and minimize its impact on our rural commu-

nity, natural environment and local economy. With the above stated improvements to scale, density, location and ensuring that topsoil is retained on project sites, the County can create an ordinance that ensures the proper scale and sites for solar which will be a good thing for Buckingham County and allow a diverse tax base for the county to grow and prosper from. But in order to do that, the County must first create a Utility Solar ordinance based on proper and established land use planning principles, work and involve the public and not be ramming thru a developer's project request without creating a baseline for judgement of the short and long term impacts that impact the County and its taxpayers.

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