

MEMORANDUM
Case # A-01-23-0001



Franklin County
A Natural Setting for Opportunity

To: Franklin County Planning Commission
From: Lisa Cooper, Planning Director
Date: December 30, 2022
Re: Comprehensive Plan Amendment for Solar Facilities
Amendment to Chapter, 11, Public Utilities/Goals, Objectives, and Strategies
of the 2007 Franklin County Comprehensive Plan

APPLICATION for AMENDMENT TO FRANKLIN COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN to amend Chapter, 11, Goals, Objectives, and Strategies of the 2007 Franklin County Comprehensive Plan pertaining to renewable energy. The purpose of the amendment is to amend strategy 36.0a to have no more than 1,500 cumulative acres occupied by utility scale solar projects throughout the County (Case # A-01-23-0001).

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission recommend approval of the amendment to Chapter 11, Public Utilities/Goals, Objectives, and Strategies of the Comprehensive Plan to amend strategy 36.0a -no more than 1,500 cumulative acres occupied by utility scale solar projects throughout the County.



On July 19, 2022, the Board adopted amendments to Chapter 25, Zoning, of the Franklin County Code to regulate solar development activities in the zoned portions of the County. These regulations include requirements for setbacks, landscaping, decommissioning and many other requirements to limit potential impacts to neighboring properties. On November 22, 2022, the Board also approved the County's first solar siting agreement with Willow Solar for a 12 MW solar facility in the non-zoned portion of the County (Blue Ridge Election District).

During the siting agreement negotiation process the Board identified two areas of additional regulation for consideration with the utility scale solar projects requests. The additional regulations were identified as follows:

1. Insert a requirement that Utility-Scale Solar Generation Facilities shall not have a total cumulative acreage of more than 1,500 acres in the zoned areas of Franklin County.
2. Insert a requirement that no above ground solar infrastructure (i.e., structures, building, inverter, or solar panels) associated with a Utility-Scale Solar Generation Facility shall be located within three hundred feet (300') from an off-site residential structure.

At the December afternoon session of the Board of Supervisors; the Board referred their requests to the Planning Commission to hold a public hearing and make a recommendation on the amendments.

The following is the proposed amendment to the Comprehensive Plan: (see highlighted portion)

Objective:

36.0 To promote the use of residential, commercial, and utility scale renewable energy in the way of solar generator facilities and wind turbines while minimizing the impact of such facilities on Franklin County's view shed and the County's natural, agricultural, scenic, tourism, and cultural resources.

Strategies:

36.0a Avoiding impact of solar facilities and wind turbines on available farmland, including prime farmland and farmland of statewide significance. To help minimize the impact, the County desires to have no more than 1500 cumulative acres occupied by utility scale solar projects throughout the County.

36.0b Solar facilities should be screened from all public rights-of-way and all adjacent properties.

36.0c Solar facilities should not visually impact scenic and cultural resources, including the view shed from residential areas and event venue spaces.



36.0d Promote sustainable building design and management practices to serve current and future generations.

36.0e Assist local businesses to lower financial and regulatory risks and improve their economic, community, and environmental sustainability.

36.0f Promote Agrivoltaics (APV) for farmers to still use the area of their land where solar facilities are located.

36.0g Solar facilities should not be located within Designated Growth Areas (DGA).

36.0h Proposed project shall be evaluated for compliance with the most recently adopted Solar Energy Facility Siting Policy document to assist the County in making substantial accord determination under Section 15.2-2232 of the Code of Virginia.

This policy shall serve as guidance for County staff, the Planning Commission, and the Board of Supervisors to evaluate whether the proposal is in substantial accord with the Comprehensive Plan.



SUGGESTED MOTIONS:

- 1) **(RECOMMEND)** I find that the proposed amendment to Chapter 11, Public Utilities/Goals, Objectives, and Strategies of the Comprehensive Plan to amend strategy 36.0a -no more than 1,500 cumulative acres occupied by utility scale solar projects throughout the County serves public necessity, convenience, general welfare, and good zoning practice. Therefore, I move to recommend approval.

OR

- 2) **(DENY)** I find that the proposed do amendment to Chapter 11, Public Utilities/Goals, Objectives, and Strategies of the Comprehensive Plan does not serve public necessity, convenience, general welfare, and good zoning practice. Therefore, I move to recommend denial.

OR

- 3) **(DELAY ACTION)** I find that the proposed amendment to Chapter 11, Public Utilities/Goals, Objectives, and Strategies of the Comprehensive Plan do not sufficiently serve public necessity, convenience, general welfare, and good zoning practice. Therefore, I moved to delay action until further information is submitted.