

**CALHOUN COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES
NOVEMBER 27, 2018**

PRESENT AND ACTING:

**GENE BAILEY, CHAIRMAN
SCOTT MONLYN, VICE-CHAIRMAN
EARL HUNT
JERAL HALL**

**MATT FUQUA, ATTORNEY
CARLA A. HAND, CLERK OF COURT AND COUNTY COMPTROLLER
SARAH WILLIAMS, CLERK ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT**

Chairman Bailey called the meeting held in the Regular Meeting room to order at 5:00 P.M., CT.

Mr. Snowden stated the Comprehensive Plan Amendment Ordinance has been advertised and is ready for adoption. Mr. Snowden stated no changes have been made to the advertised amendment or ordinance and there have been no comments from outside agencies objecting to the amendment. Mr. Snowden stated the adoption of the amendment and ordinance were scheduled in October, but had to be postponed due to Hurricane Michael.

- ❖ Commissioner Hunt made a motion to recommend approval of the amendment and ordinance to the Board of County Commissioners. Commissioner Hall seconded the motion. Chairman Baily asked Mr. Snowden to summarize for the new Commissioners the purpose of the Comprehensive Plan Amendment. Mr. Snowden stated with the amendment, as long as there is compliance with the County's Floodplain Ordinance; it would allow property owners to build on their property without having to double their acreage. There was further discussion about the amendment. The motion passed unanimously 4-0.

Mr. Snowden introduced Mr. Mike Hill with Innovative Solar Systems LLC, who has submitted a Conditional Use Permit application for the development of a 406-acre solar farm in Calhoun County off Hamilton Springs Road. Mr. Hill presented a PowerPoint presentation to the Board and explained the company's proposal. Mr. Hill stated the proposed solar farm would consist of dark glass solar panels that would convert sunlight directly into electricity. Mr. Hill stated this solar farm is not the type of solar farm that uses mirrors of any type, which are more in use in the western United States. Mr. Hill stated solar power is a clean, renewable form of energy, and has low impacts to the environment. Mr. Hill stated Innovative Solar Systems is based in Ashville, North Carolina, and the two (2) founders, John and Richard Green, of the Company have fifty (50) years combined experience in the energy field, and in construction and development. Mr. Hill stated they have a skilled engineering team, as well as an experienced land development team, and other colleagues who work with utility companies to secure contracts for the sale of solar power. Mr. Hill stated the company has developed over 1,000 megawatts of projects to date in North Carolina, and the proposed project in Calhoun County would be a 406-acre project, which would produce about 55 megawatts of electricity. Mr. Hill stated estimates vary, but this amount of electricity could power roughly 8,000 to 10,000 homes. Mr. Hill stated the property is currently zoned agricultural, and no changes are proposed to the zoning of the property. Mr. Hill stated the tax revenues generated from the project would go to the County and school district, and no burdens would be imposed on the County as far as water, sewer, fire service, or law enforcement. Mr. Hill stated

solar farms do not produce any offsite noise or produce fumes. Mr. Hill stated once construction is complete, there would be very little traffic to and from the solar farm. Mr. Hill stated technicians and maintenance crews would likely only visit the site once or twice per month. Mr. Hill stated during construction there would be around 125 to 180 workers for about twelve (12) to fifteen (15) months. Mr. Hill stated they are leasing the property, so the property would remain locally owned, and would be able to be returned to agricultural use after the solar farm reaches its end of useful life of about 35 years if the property owners wished. Mr. Hill stated the site would be vegetative after the installation of the solar panels, and would be planted with native grasses and plants to help with erosion resistance and water infiltration. Mr. Hill showed the Board a vicinity map, proposed site plan, and other photos and information associated with the proposed site of the solar farm. Mr. Hill stated a twenty-five (25) foot landscape buffer would surround the solar farm as well as a six (6) foot high chain-link fence topped with barbed wire to keep the area secure, with access gates for entry and exit. Mr. Hill explained to the Board how the solar panels would work, stating the panels are on a racking system with motorized trackers to track the sun, and would tilt throughout the day as they follow the sun and reset over night for sunrise the next morning. A member of the audience asked if the solar panels would lay flat overnight, stating he was concerned a night bird might fly into the panels if they were standing upright. Mr. Hill stated he did not know when the panels made the change to become vertical for sunrise, but this is a concern that could be addressed with the programmers who are responsible for controlling the panel orientation and could possibly program the panels to be flat overnight to avoid issues with birds.

Chairman Bailey opened the floor to public comment.

Mr. William Wallace stated he is excited about the solar farm, believes it is a wonderful opportunity for the County to get on board with renewable energy. Mr. Wallace urged the Board to vote in favor of the solar farm.

Mr. Travis MacClendon asked what species of grass would be planted at the site after the solar panels are installed. Mr. Hill stated he was not sure, but that they would be working with the local extension office on what species of grass they would recommend planting for the area.

Ms. Eugenia Hoke asked if there would be any glare from the solar panels when they are standing vertically. Mr. Hill stated the panels are designed with an anti-reflective coating built in and are designed and intended to absorb sunlight, not reflect it. Ms. Hoke asked if the solar panels negatively affect animals or people. Mr. Hill stated there is no harmful effects to animals or humans. Mr. Hill stated from the air the panels have been characterized to look like a body of water; birds could land on the panels without harm. Mr. Hill stated ground animals can walk underneath the panels without harm, and some solar farms even utilize sheep to graze the grass and cut down on maintenance costs. Mr. Hill stated the water that falls off the solar panels during rains absorbs into the ground, and they would be conducting a storm water management study and receiving a storm water permit before construction begins to make sure there is no increased runoff from the property than there is currently.

Commissioner Monlyn asked how tall the fence would be that would surround the solar farm. Mr. Hill stated the chain link fence would be about seven (7) feet tall, including the barbed wire around the top. Commissioner Monlyn asked how tall the solar panels would be when standing upright. Mr. Hill stated the panels would be about fourteen (14) feet tall. Commissioner Monlyn asked if a tarp could be installed along the fence to keep the solar panels from sight along the roadway so there would not be a glare from the panels to people driving on the road. Mr. Hill stated if the Board wanted something opaque along the fence to obstruct the view slats could be inserted into the fence, but glare should be

minimal because of the design of the panels. Mr. Hill stated there would also be a landscape buffer, so the solar farm should not be very visible from the road.

Chairman Bailey closed the floor to public comment.

Chairman Bailey stated a letter has been received in opposition of the solar farm from Jeris Pitts, and entered the letter into the record. Mr. Hill stated concerning the letter, there were a number of points raised. Mr. Hill stated there was concern about who would maintain the solar farm, and the answer to that question would be that the responsibility of maintenance would fall onto Innovative Solar Systems, not the property owners. Mr. Hill stated they would maintain the solar panels, and would be responsible for the decommissioning of the solar panels and their removal at their end of life. Mr. Hill stated there was concern raised in the letter about the solar panels containing toxic materials. Mr. Hill stated the only potentially toxic material in the type of solar panels they use would be a small amount of lead in the solder that is used to make the electrical connections within the panel that is chemically and physically bonded into the solar panel. Mr. Hill stated the solar panels are recyclable, and even if not recycled, could be disposed of in any conventional landfill because they do not contain any toxic waste materials or liquid that could leak out. Mr. Hill stated there was also concern about birds, but there is no harm to birds from the type of solar panels that would be installed. Mr. Hill asked for a 2017 report by the North Carolina State University be included into the record regarding the health and safety impacts of solar panels that would address the concerns raised in the letter submitted.

Chairman Bailey asked where the employees to build and maintain the solar farm would come from. Mr. Hill stated they use a contractor for the construction of the solar farm, who would try to hire locally. Mr. Hill stated there are some aspects of construction that are specialized and would have to be handled by a specially trained electrician, so it is likely those workers would be brought in from out of town. Mr. Hill stated the contractor could work with the County to recruit and hire locally to do some of the work so there would be a direct benefit to the residents of the community.

Commissioner Monlyn asked how many jobs would be created by the solar farm. Mr. Hill stated the number of jobs would vary depending on the phase of construction, but there would be anywhere from 125 to 180 jobs during the construction phase. Mr. Hill stated they want to see the benefits of employment come to the County residents to the greatest extent possible, so they would try to work with the County economic development officer prior to the start of the construction process so they could have coordination for job recruitment.

- ❖ Commissioner Monlyn made a motion to recommend approval of the Conditional Use Permit for Innovative Solar Systems LLC to the Board of County Commissioners. Commissioner Hunt seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously 4-0.

Attorney Fuqua stated typically it is asked if anyone would like their comments to be carried forward into the Board of County Commissioners meeting so they do not have to repeat themselves. There was no request to carry forward comments.

Mr. Snowden stated Mr. Robert Daniels has property on State Road 71 North that has been in operation as a mobile home park, which was destroyed during the hurricane. Mr. Snowden stated Mr. Daniels is interested in putting in some RVs for temporary housing. Mr. Daniels stated since the storm he has been inundated with calls about RV lots, and has spoken with several people about placing FEMA trailers on his lot. Mr. Daniels stated he has spoken with the Health Department and has been told he could place

eighteen (18) RVs on the property. Mr. Daniels stated FEMA has not contacted him back about the placement of FEMA trailers, but there is a company out of Bartow that has been interested in renting all eighteen (18) spots for their workers who are working here and in surrounding counties. Mr. Daniels stated he would need the Board's approval before clearing the property and going to the expense of putting in the eighteen (18) RV spots. Commissioner Bailey stated the Board has some reservation about the length of time the property would be an RV park, and stated FEMA trailers would only be permitted for eighteen (18) months. Mr. Daniels stated if the RV Park continued and were profitable for him and Calhoun County he would not be opposed to keeping RVs there if the necessary zoning were obtained, but would request at least eighteen (18) months minimum permission for RVs with as much money as it would cost to get started. Chairman Bailey stated this was first presented to the Board as an emergency solution to Hurricane Michael for the placement of FEMA trailers due to the shortage of homes. Mr. Snowden stated a permanent RV park would not be an allowable use in this area, and would require permitting and more specific design and septic system. Mr. Snowden stated he feels a technical review meeting is needed to further discuss the issue. Attorney Fuqua stated it has been the position of the Board in the past that permanent RV parks are not permitted. Attorney Fuqua stated he understood the Board would be permitting this use on a temporary basis because of the shortage of housing. Mr. Daniels stated the cost to install the RV poles and sewage pumps for the RVs is quite expensive, so it could be a lot of money to invest and then have to pull it all back out to replace the mobile homes that were destroyed. Mr. Daniels stated he needs income coming back into his mobile home park, and at this time, RVs are the best way to accomplish this. There was further discussion about the RV placement. There was a decision to hold a Technical Review Planning Workshop on December 5 @ 3:00 to discuss the issue.

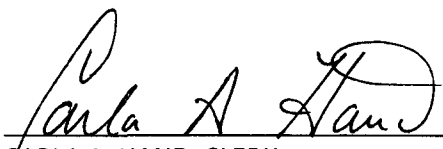
Mr. Snowden stated he received a call this evening from someone in Panama City who would like to haul debris from Bay County and disperse it in Calhoun County. Mr. Snowden stated this would also need to be discussed at the Technical Review Planning Workshop so he could gather further information to present to the Board.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 5:57 p.m., CT.



GENE BAILEY, CHAIRMAN

ATTEST:



CARLA A. HAND, CLERK