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**COMMISSIONER COMMUNICATION MEMORANDUM**

To: Commissioners of St. Mary's County  
Dr. Rebecca B. Bridgett, County Administrator

From: William B. Hunt, Director *WBH*

Date: March 9, 2021

Subject: Request for Public Hearing by the Solar Task Force for a moratorium on utility-scale solar projects

**Topic:** The Solar Task Force is recommending that the Commissioners of St. Mary's County adopt a temporary moratorium on utility-scale solar projects.

**Background:** On January 8, 2020, the Commissioners of St. Mary's County approved the request to form a Solar Task Force. The task force would meet monthly for six months.

On October 20, 2020, the Commissioners of St. Mary's County voted to authorize the Solar Task Force to continue meeting monthly. The final report is due June 2021.

On November 18, 2020, the Solar Task Force met and discussed recommending a "Freeze on utility scale solar projects."

On November 30, 2020, the County Attorney wrote a memo to the Solar Task Force regarding a "Temporary Moratorium on new utility-scale solar projects." The memo and the draft ordinance for the moratorium are included.

On December 9, 2020, the Solar Task Force met and voted on the motion: "The Task Force moves to recommend the County Commissioners adopt a temporary moratorium on the reviewing and approving of new applications for utility-scale solar projects, pending the passage of new zoning and regulatory requirements for St. Mary's County. The moratorium should last approximately one year from today's date." The motion was carried by a majority vote of the Solar Task Force.

The proposed moratorium will allow the Chesapeake Conservancy, currently under contract, to finish its report to the Solar Task Force and to allow the recommendations from that report to be incorporated into a solar siting ordinance for St. Mary's County. The report will include, among other things:

- Identify legally and technically feasible solar sites, screening out areas where zoning, protection status or other factors preclude solar energy development.
- Identify optimal solar siting for St. Mary's County, identifying solar energy development opportunities for rooftop solar (residential, commercial, and public sector), solar parking canopies

(parking lots >1 acre), degraded or contaminated sites (Voluntary Cleanup Program sites, capped landfills, underutilized industrial sites, etc.), and on county-owned properties.

- Identify preferred locations for ground-mounted solar energy development including rural lands not on prime agricultural soils, and avoiding ecologically sensitive lands including forest, wetlands, and other ecologically sensitive lands.
- Score land parcels for suitable solar opportunity area not on forested, environmentally sensitive, or important agricultural land.
- Calculate electricity generation potential of optimal and preferred solar energy development sites.

The information from the Chesapeake Conservancy report will be critical in writing a comprehensive ordinance for St. Mary's County on the siting of utility-scale solar farms. The moratorium will allow time for the completion of the report and drafting an ordinance that includes the important provisions that will be in the report.

**Recommendation:** Authorize staff to schedule a public hearing for February 23, 2021 for public comments on the amendment to adopt a temporary moratorium on the reviewing and approving of new applications for utility-scale solar projects.

**Attachments:**

- November 30<sup>th</sup> memo from County Attorney
- December 9<sup>th</sup> minutes of the Solar Task Force
- A proposed ordinance to adopt a temporary moratorium on the reviewing and approving of new applications for utility-scale solar projects.

**Timeline:**

February 2<sup>nd</sup> – Request for Public Hearing

February 5<sup>th</sup> – *Southern Maryland News* publishes first notice

February 12<sup>th</sup> – *Southern Maryland News* publishes second notice

February 23<sup>rd</sup> – Public Hearing 9:00 a.m.

March 2<sup>nd</sup> - Public comment period closes

March 9<sup>th</sup> – Decision