

Summary of Solar Hearing on September 16th 2021 At Southern State

On Thursday, September 16th the Highland County Board of Commissioners held a Public Hearing concerning solar projects in and around Highland County. 68 people signed the sign-in sheet, 22 people testified, 13 in support of solar projects, 9 as opponents to solar projects.

The format of the hearing was Highland County residents were given 5 minutes to voice their concerns and after the hearing we would provide a transcript of that hearing and answer any questions that were asked during the course of the evening. The meeting was video and audio recorded, and we have transcribed the audio to the best of our ability given the limitations of the recording equipment. But we believe the transcription that is provided accurately reflects the comments that were made.

Industrial scale solar developers have been working in our area for many years to begin projects that would produce solar electricity into the grid. They have contacted private property owners and those property owners have leased or sold their land, which is their right to do. **It is important to point out that these are not projects that are managed or sought by the Highland County Commissioners.** They are private contracts between companies that are authorized to do business in Ohio and private landowners.

We established Payment in Lieu of Taxes or PILOTs for these projects as well as Road Use Maintenance Agreements that are within our authority under current law. The Ohio General Assembly this year passed Senate Bill 52, which is effective October 11, 2021. This new law gives County Commissioners and Township Trustees some additional authorities as it relates to siting large scale wind and solar projects. The bill authorizes a Commissioner and Township Trustee in the project area to be an ad hoc voting member of the power siting board for projects that come before the board for approval. The bill also allows the Commissioners to designate restricted zones that ban solar and wind projects all together.

We believe Senate Bill 52 fell short. While it gives us the ability to be a part of the Power Siting Process, it made relatively small changes to the siting criteria for such projects. The projects are still required to meet the standards that are currently in place, with a few minor exceptions. As we have stated on more than one occasion, we believe that changes could and should be made to the power siting process and the legislature failed in their responsibility to make those changes.

Over the last several days we have worked to provide answers to the questions that were presented at the meeting that night and you will find those answers attached to this transcription and document. There is a great deal of emotion on these issues from both proponents and opponents and interested parties. We certainly recognize that the placement of a solar farm could be objectionably aesthetically to many people as could any number of other things.

We have tried to respect that the law allows private landowners to enter into these agreements with these companies that are authorized to do business in the State of Ohio. Going forward, we are trying to develop criteria that can be followed by our board and future boards of commissioners in determining whether restricted zones should be granted and what that process should be. We are working to develop guidelines that any future developer must look at and understand where we will be as far as approving or objecting to the projects that are submitted. We are also trying to determine how we will interact with other counties and jurisdictions when projects are in more than one county.

We understand that not everyone will be happy with our decisions, but we also know that we are responsible to consider more than one single aspect of any project or any one point of view. Examples are: how it could affect our schools, our Developmentally Disabled population, the ADAMH board, libraries, township budgets, and other residents of the county that increased general fund revenue could provide additional services. How could it affect economic development within our county? Whether or not it allows landowners the opportunity to keep their land in their family, and whether they are legally allowed to do so. We also need to consider how it affects those non-participating land owners. The OPSB through its processes must consider the effects on the environment, air and water pollution concerns, and solid waste disposal issues among many other considerations. That is why we are considering what guidelines we will require to be supportive of future projects before the OPSB.

We recognize this report will not satisfy many of the opinions that are surfacing. We will continue to listen and keep ourselves current on the latest trends and developments as it relates to these issues.

Sincerely



Jeff Duncan



Terry Britton



David Daniels