



June 7, 2018

Re: Testimony before the Baltimore County Planning Committee on Solar Facility Legislation

Dear Chairman and Members of the Baltimore County Planning Committee,

The North County Community Group supports solar energy development and reducing Baltimore County's reliance on fossil fuels. However, we feel strongly that a solar energy siting plan be developed first that protects all prime and productive farmland for agriculture. We urge you to go further in your recommendations to the county council.

The intent of Bill 37-17 was to support the solar industry, help the state achieve its renewable energy goals, and to a lesser extent, help farmers. By no measure has this bill moved Baltimore County closer to achieving any of these goals.

- No projects have been built under the standards in this bill.
- Property owners in District 3 are shouldering the financial burden of appealing every special exception granted.
- No community benefit is guaranteed. All solar energy generated would be sold to the grid for use anywhere and local farmers are losing cropland.
- The County's storm water management review process has no precedent to guide evaluation of solar facilities.
- Many residents were surprised to discover that Bill 37-17 provides for a new commercial use on land zoned for agriculture and a process to grant limited exemptions for this use without community input.
- Many are now shocked to see 50 years of preservation planning and easement garnering go totally ignored as fertile fields are aggressively targeted by solar companies.

Bill 37-17 allows utility-scale solar on resource conservation property with a special exception. Resource conservation is some of the most restrictive zoning in Baltimore County because the area contains the most environmentally-sensitive land in the county. Preservation of rural land keeps agriculture thriving, protects the county's watershed, maintains the environmental purity of forests and green spaces, and gives residents an enhanced quality of life.

The accelerated financial rate of return being offered by solar companies is undermining decades of investment in land preservation programs and Maryland's agriculture industry. Fertile fields are aggressively targeted by solar companies. Properties targeted for utility-scale power plants are frequently not in isolated areas. They are in rural communities, watersheds and other environmentally-sensitive areas, and along scenic byways.

Northern Baltimore County has a tier 3 water quality designation, the highest rating in the system. The seeps, creeks and runs feed reservoirs which are the water source for the Baltimore metropolitan area. These watershed

lands and their associated resource conservation zoning were established for the protection of our drinking water supply quality. Current regulations do not require a hydrology study be conducted during the storm water management review process. Without this, it is not possible to ascertain that a solar facility will not be detrimental to the health, safety, or general welfare of the area.

In addition to a solar energy siting plan, we recommend the following changes to Bill 37-17 to accelerate solar energy progress, protect our farmland and reduce community conflict.

1. Require the stormwater management review process to be revised to address topography and solar panel runoff.
2. Permit solar facilities by right on previously developed and disturbed areas. This increases the efficiency of land use and eliminates special exception requirement.
3. Allow solar facilities as an accessory use on agricultural land, like Harford, Carroll and Montgomery Counties. This will help farmers, not owners of farmland who normally sublet to farmers.
4. In addition to my earlier points, remove the arbitrary and capricious allocation per Councilmatic District.

Help Baltimore County be a leader in SMART solar energy and protect our best farmland.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Pieper  
President  
North County Community Group