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TO: **Vance County Planning Board** **FROM:** **Jordan McMillen**
SUBJECT: **Minutes of the July 16, 2015 Special Planning Board Meeting**
DATE: **July 16, 2015 4:00 PM to 5:15 PM**

Board Members: Thomas Shaw (Chairperson), Phyllis Stainback (Vice Chairperson), Ruth Brummitt, Agnes Harvin

County Staff: Jordan McMillen, David Robinson **Absent:** Alvin Johnson, Jr., Blake Haley

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◈ Mr. Shaw moved to the next agenda item.

A. **Proposed Zoning Ordinance Amendments Discussion & Recommendation – Solar Farms**

- Mr. McMillen explained that the Board of Commissioners failed to approve the previously recommended solar farm regulations. As a result of a failed vote, it is necessary for the Planning Board to re-review and provide a recommendation.
- He further reviewed the proposed zoning ordinance and stated that the greatest area of discussion from the commissioners regarded the 100 foot setback the entire way around the farm and whether that should be reduced. Mr. McMillen reviewed the planning boards reasoning for previously recommending the 100 foot setback as follows: The board felt that 100 setback reduced visual impact, encouraged agricultural character and allowed use of existing trees to be utilized if they are present with a larger setback.
- Ms. Staiback explained that the planning board is not against solar, but feels that it has been portrayed in that manner. Mr. McMillen mentioned that he believes the commissioners are also pro-solar as a majority, but feels the commissioners are looking to balance enacting regulations that would prevent any additional solar development.
- The board discussed their desire for having farmers and property owners to take the responsibility for siting solar farms in appropriate areas that would not have a negative impact on surrounding properties. Ms. Harvin questioned the percentage of solar farms that are on leased land vs. ownership of the land. Mr. McMillen responded that 3 of the 5 farms in operation are owned by the solar entity.
- Ms. Stainback questioned whether the proposed ordinance included language that would ensure proper vegetation to screen the solar farms. Mr. McMillen responded that the proposed ordinance does have provisions for vegetation and also provides language that could encourage the use of berms and other topographical features which may assist in hiding the solar farms from view. The board discussed their preference for use of existing vegetation as it would screen the farm from the beginning as opposed to waiting a minimum of 3 years as is allowed within the ordinance.

Motion made by Ms. Harvin to recommend the solar zoning amendment to the Board of Commissioners as presented previously inclusive of a 100 foot setback on all sides. The justification for a large setback area is to allow the use of existing foliage thereby reducing the visual impact of solar farms. Additionally it is felt that the 100 foot setback is more compatible with encouraging agricultural character with greater separation of uses.
Second was made by Ms. Brummitt.
The board discussed whether the commissioners should meet with the planning board to negotiate or to determine the best path forward for the ordinance. Mr. McMillen mentioned that the commissioners will use their Planning and Environmental Committee to review the ordinance prior to holding a public hearing and deciding on the ordinance amendment. The planning board welcomed a meeting with the committee or the commissioners if needed.
Motion passed 4-0.

◈ **Adjournment.**

A. With no further agenda items, the board adjourned the meeting.