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Date: July 8, 2020 at 1:10:47 PM EDT
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Subject: Regarding Zoning Text Amendment 20-01, Solar Collection System – AR Zone Standards

To: Jeff Zyontz, Senior Legislative Analyst

From: David Blockstein, Ph.D., Member, Montgomery County Clean Energy Working Group

Regarding Zoning Text Amendment 20-01, Solar Collection System – AR Zone Standards

July 8, 2020

I have reviewed your briefing memo for tomorrow's

PHED/T&E

Joint Transportation and Environment and Planning, Housing, and Economic Development Committee Meeting

I am concerned that it mis-represents the position of the Montgomery County Clean Energy Working Group, of which I am a member. The working group is not in favor of commercial solar development in the agricultural reserve.

The statement on page 7 – “The strategies most relevant to ZTA 20-01 drafted by the Clean Energy

Workgroup supported some use of the Agricultural Reserve for solar facilities.5” is a gross overrepresentation and misinterpretation.

You may not have seen our introductory statement, which is very clear:

“However, it would be counterproductive for the County to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by turning forests, farmlands and wetlands into industrial facilities for energy capture. These vegetated lands and the soil beneath are important in capturing carbon from the atmosphere, reducing the urban heat island and providing clean water, clean air, biodiversity and other ecosystem services. Preservation and protection of the environment should be an essential component of the County’s shift to net zero.”

Our group proposed a strategy that began with research and ranking of potential sites.

You did not cite:

Strategy 2.2 – Assess feasible public and private locations for solar and wind installations of

various scales in Montgomery County and adjacent jurisdictions.

Action 2.2.1 – Develop a ranking system to categorize sites based on economic, environmental, and social considerations.

Maybe it was not apparent to you that our working group intended that this assessment and ranking be done before any development.

You do cite:

Action 2.5.1 – Evaluate environmental and ecological impact of using land in the agricultural reserve for solar.

Action 2.5.2 – Establish demonstration projects to co-locate PV solar with agricultural production (such as grazing) and pollinator meadows.

This should NOT be interpreted as “supporting some use of the ag reserve...” We favor research to evaluate the agricultural reserve including the demonstration projects to

assess the compatibility of small solar projects with agriculture. But this is very different than saying that we “support some use”... in the context of the proposed ZTA change.

Please insert this clarification in the record of the work session tomorrow.

Please also insert the attached introduction to our recommendations.

I have bcc:d the other members of our working group

Thank you very much

David

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