**Walter M. Gardner, Jr. Robert F. Davie Jr.**

 **Mayor Town Administrator**

**TOWN OF WARRENTON**

*“Historically Great - Progressively Strong”*

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**Zoning and Planning Committee**

**April 23, 2015**

The April 23, 2015 meeting of the Zoning and Planning Committee was called to order by Chairperson John Mooring. Committee members in attendance were Mary Hunter and John Mooring. Additional attendees were Commissioner Margaret Britt, Attorney Mitch Styers and Town Administrator Robert Davie. Eleven citizens were present.

Chairman Mooring called the meeting to order and asked for citizen comments. Citizens were limited to two minutes. Debbe Speer did not want to see Solar Farms in the town area because they are bad for property values. She also spoke on behalf of Bob Neal. Ken Speer stated that Solar Farms must notify airports if they lie within five miles of an airport and he asked that there be more time to look at the issues. Lynette Rodwell stated there are still many unknowns with regard to Solar Farms and long term effects of toxic materials in panels are unknown. She is allergic to many things, including exposure to the sun. Horace Shearin indicated that he had lived on Dowtin Street, a residential area next to a proposed Solar Farm, for fifty years and nine families on his street did not want a Solar Farm on that end of town.

After citizen comments, Mooring stated there are no lots large enough in town for a Solar Farm, but only in the ETJ. Commissioner Hunter stated that the reason Warrenton sees so much activity is because of the rural areas surrounding town and a need for income to replace crop income. Debbe Speer asked if the Town was gaining anything. Mooring stated that the Town would receive no financial benefit. Hunter stated that the Committee wanted to respect the wishes of residents surrounding a proposed Solar Farm.

Rodwell asked how long would do solar fixtures last. Mooring indicated there is degradation after 25 years. Rodwell asked if the land would be damaged in any way. Mooring stated that equipment is typically removed after its useful life. Shearin stated that Dowtin Street was the only ingress and egress for construction equipment to the proposed Solar Farm in his area. Mooring stated his deference for property rights but also to residential property owners. Mooring felt the consensus was to dis-allow Solar Farms on top of residences. Mitch Styers stated a problem existed because there was no mixed-use zoning in R-20 in Warrenton. Robert Davie read the list of permitted uses in R-20 from the zoning ordinances.

Mooring asked Styers if it were possible to allow Solar Farms in areas only zoned as industrial. Styers stated that to require a specific Solar Farm to rezone, it could be construed as discriminatory. Mooring stated that the purposed of the meeting was to set up rules for all not one. Henry Rodwell stated that he was contacted about a Solar Farm on acreage that he owned near Littleton, NC. Because of right of way issues he felt it would not go through or could not be accomplished before the tax credits ran out. Mooring stated that the credits ran out on December 31, 2015.

Hunter asked what can be done. Styers stated that a setback from a residential lot with a structure on it could be an alternative, by keeping the Special Use permit in place and setting guidelines within it. The Board of Commissioners could consider setbacks, access, topography and other issues as long as they were reasonable. Speer asked if the Solar Farms could be eliminated from the Residential zoning all together. Styers stated that anything done to restrict utilities would be challenged. Hunter asked if objections by adjacent property owners would be sufficient to reject a Special Use permit and asked for all reasons a permit could be rejected. Styers responded that the Board could consider buffers, traffic, things dealing with appearance. Styers felt that the current Special Use ordinance language was generic enough to allow the Board control and flexibility. Hunter stated that it sounds like there is more control by leaving the Special Use in place and not adding additional ordinances for Solar Farms.

Hunter stated that the purpose of the meeting was to decide two things: if an additional ordinance is needed and to address the moratorium on Solar Farms. Margaret Britt stated that a petition existed and that it should carry strong weight when considering the issues at hand. Styers confirmed more control with the existing Special Use language. Hunter stated the reason for the moratorium was to allow time to craft an ordinance and since the consensus was to keep the Special Use language there was no further need for the moratorium. Hunter and Mooring agreed to recommend to the full Board of Commissioners the following:

1. Leave the current Special Use language in place
2. Lift the moratorium on Solar Farms
3. Remove Solar Farms from Special Use in the zoning ordinances as soon as possible.