

**GADSDEN COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
PLANNING COMMISSION PUBLIC WORKSHOP
MEETING MINUTES**

**Thursday, December 3, 2015
6:00 PM**

Board of County Commissioners Meeting Room
7 East Jefferson St
Quincy, Florida

Present: Commissioner Regina Davis, At - Large Member, Chair
Commissioner Dr. Gail Bridges – Bright (arrived late)
Commissioner Frank Rowan
Commissioner William Chukes
Commissioner Edward J. Dixon (arrived late)
Commissioner John Youmans
Commissioner Marion Lasley
Commissioner Lori Bouie
David Weiss, County Attorney
Allara Gutcher, Planning & Community Development Director
Jill Jeglie, Senior Planner
Beryl H. Wood, Deputy Clerk

Absent: Commissioner Mari VanLandingham
Commissioner David Tranchand
Commissioner Roger Milton, School Board Representative
Commissioner Gerald McSwain

1. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chair Davis called the workshop to order at 6:00 p.m. She then led in the pledge of allegiance to the US Flag and asked each person to silence their electronic devices for the duration of the meeting.

2. INTRODUCTION OF MEMBERS/ROLL CALL

Each member present stated their name and district for which they represent.

3. DISCLOSURES AND DECLARATIONS OF CONFLICT – None

4. DISCUSSION - SOLAR WORKSHOP PACKET

Discussion of Solar Energy Generation Facilities (Farms), Solar Energy Systems and proposed regulations related to them. Matt Chetnik, Director of Engineering with

Independent Green Technologies will provide an overview and answer questions relating to solar energy production and contracting.

Ms. Jeglie commented on Solar Energy Systems. She said she had meet with Matt Chetnik, Director of Engineering Independent green Technologies. She had asked him to look into the solar draft portion of the Land Development Regulations to provide comment. She explained this is a guide for discussion when developing standards for solar.

Matt Chentink gave history of his expertise. He said he was a State of Florida Certified Solar Contractor and the founder of Independent Green Technologies (IGT) which is an American company that started in 2008. It utilizes American products that assist individuals and businesses to reduce or “zero-out” their electric bill and become independent generators of their electricity from the sun and wind. He said he has done solar projects for many business and residents throughout. He said he teaches solar electric classes.

He discussed solar power generation facilities and solar energy systems. Innovative energy independent solutions will be delivered primarily through energy efficiencies, solar, wind and geothermal products. He answered any questions the Commission had on solar.

Chair Davis asked did he go over the draft that was prepared by staff and if so were there any comments?

Mr. Chentink said there was nothing stated that was alarming to him. He said most of the information pertained to solar farms. He said there were several different types of solar: residential, commercial and utility scale, which this document refers to primarily such as what power companies use or build. He said the price of solar has come down and it makes sense, it's cost effective to build solar generation stations. He said there is a big upfront cost but, then there would never be fuel cost

Chair Davis asked the Commission for questions regarding solar and they entered an array of dialogue with Mr. Chentink.

Commissioner Dixon asked did this approach just discuss solar on the commercial side.

Ms. Jeglie said there was a section on Solar Energy Systems and Solar Power Generating Facility.

Mr. Chentnik said residential solar is probably the most common, and that you can make your utility bill smaller or cut it out all together. Most solar power systems are riptide, which means, battery-less systems. He said they can work for decades. He said most are mounted on the roof of the house, because that's where the electrical is. He stated

there are a lot of existing codes already in place, natural electric code, building code, fire codes that govern. As far as restrictions, you can't prevent someone from putting in solar nor can the electric utility company. He said there are guidelines that they must follow, but the Florida Solar Rights Law allows anyone to put solar anywhere they need to on their property. He said the most important thing utility companies are looking for is land that is adjacent to high-voltage transition lines or substations.

Chair Davis asked about the Florida Solar Rights Law, when drafting this document she asked was it taken into consideration. She said she was asking because when she reads development standards for residential uses, it speaks to being prohibited within the front four corners of your yard.

Ms. Jeglie said they have language that addresses that. She referenced Florida Statue 163.04. It does say you can regulate location but you can't do it to the point that it prohibits installation of solar collectors. She said one of the thoughts they shared in the power-point was a disclaimer that says something to that effect. Nothing in the regulation is meant to prohibit solar management systems. She stated typical determination does not impair the effective operation of the solar collection pursuant to Chapter 163.04 of the Florida Statues.

Commissioner Bouie inquired on the commercial utility scale. Was there any way they could address the issue of future use limitations. She said they touched upon one of the issues, a notification of neighbors concerning the solar farms.

Mr. Chentnik said if he had property next to a proposed solar farm he would want to know things about it. Citizens would have a right to know a reasonable setback on the property the solar farm is going on or possibly some type of buffer, so they don't have to see it. He added plantings would also work, such as a row of trees to hide view. He said there would be hardly any noise, low maintenance; it would be fenced, nothing intrusive.

Commissioner Lasley asked about heat being produced in the panels. She also voiced her concern dealing with the glare factor, visual feel and eminent domain.

Mr. Chentnik said yes there would be heat, but nothing unsafe and it would not affect anyone nearby. He said concerning the panels the object is to collect light, not heat, but they will get hot especially during the summer months. He said they are made out of silicon. He said the glare is reflected to the bare minimum.

Commissioner Chukes asked about residential solar systems. Mr. Chentnik said with placement of residential solar systems the same breaker box would be used. He said it works by special batteries that harness sunlight; transform it into energy, then that energy to an inverter, which converts it into electricity to power the home.

Commissioner Dixon asked what the two most important things are about position of a solar farm. Mr. Chentnik said his concerns would be someone trying to clear cut a bunch of old mature trees. Solar can go into any type of land: hard dirt, clay, sand, rock and landfills, etc. You wouldn't want to put it on wetlands or protective environments. He said this type of solar does not put wildlife in danger.

Commissioner Youman asked about profit on residential systems. Mr. Chentnik discussed benefits of residential solar systems. He said the return on investments is better than it was a few short years ago. He said Florida does have a few incentives.

Public Comment:

Michael Dorian 145 Alligator Run, "I think this is a good clean enterprise." He expressed his concerns on the industrial side, and not encouraging the individual user to put anything on their house. He said this is industrial use and would like to see the setback of 50ft further set to 100ft. He said that they would have a requirement to clean the panels, concerned about the maintenance. He discussed the rooftop panels going from 3ft go to 5ft for the homeowners and would like to see barriers at 15ft high on solar farms. He had concerns with battery leakage. He would like to see something concrete in the Code concerning batteries. If company complies, would that mean they wouldn't have to go through any hearing process with the neighborhoods to notify citizens. He also asked would the Florida Statutes restrict 3ft or 5ft angle off the top of the roof.

Mr. Chentnik said concerning the 15ft buffer: the back may, but the front probably would not be. It would make sense to have a high buffer with a solar farm on flat land. He discussed trucks coming through and added there would be gravel roads and maintenance; pollen would have to be cleaned off the panels. He added the 100ft setback is reasonable.

Commissioner Bouie said her concern was with language on heights with technology changing daily on both farms and residential, numbers shouldn't be placed. She didn't want limits for the County which may prohibit who would want to come to Gadsden.

Commissioner Lasley voiced her concern with solar farm placement.

Commissioner Bouie said all the steps of placement for the solar farm would still occur, so notification would be addressed.

Mr. Chentnik said he felt they should leave an out; to make a change in case a problem arises. He felt what was proposed was well written by staff.

Ms. Jeglie said she drew something up that seems to be the most consistent standard. She said it is up to the Commission whether they want to implement that standard or not. She shared her main concern now is that when she does get a call now she can't clearly look at the Code and say you are allowed in x, y and z district. She said it was an

interpretation and an interpretation when the Code doesn't clearly say "solar generating power facility" and the requirement changes with whoever is making that interpretation. She said from her perspective she would like to know what is allowed in each of the land use categories.

Commissioner Youman asked about job placement for local residents. He asked would they bring their own crew in to maintain system.

Mr. Chentnik said solar farms would bring in jobs and could be done numerous ways. He said it would be low maintenance work but, on the construction side it could employ many. He said it is always cheaper to use the local labor force.

Commissioner Lasley said it would be beneficial to read the Florida Code Review on natural solar power request. She asked that they write the Code where it works for everyone.

Commissioner Dr. Bridges – Bright commented they had learned in a previous meeting about power lines and solar farms being near to each other, since the change would have to take place. She questioned the solar panel placing in wide areas of the power lines where they are cut. She asked could the panels be placed in those areas. She asked could it be located on a shared land use.

Mr. Chentnik said they could fit anywhere, they just need good sun. He said it could be a shared land use although, he has not seen one built that way.

Chair Davis referenced Attachment 1 and asked were their questions or comments on the 1st page of definitions.

Commissioner Dixon asked that they be given time to reread about solar energy systems and proposed regulations related to them with the knowledge given at this meeting. Chair Davis suggested they write their questions down and give them to staff so they can answer questions and submit to the Commission in its entirety.

Ms. Jeglie asked that they consider regulations with solar farms when in relation to the industry standards.

Commissioner Bouie said she was of the opinion that they were off to a pretty good start, she felt satisfied. Her concern was with concrete numbers for height.

Mrs. Gutcher said they have tried to get information from the co-op utility company, but have discovered they aren't allowed to give the location of utility lines due to security concerns.

Commissioner Dixon said he would like to be creative and give a visual presentation and to be able to ask what this really means on the ground. He said they should be mindful how they structure the language.

Commissioner Lasley said language should be tweaked to ensure to protect homeowners concerning buffers as related to solar farms not residential.

Ms. Jeglie stated there was language in Code for their consideration and urged that they take another look at all the information they had received from this workshop.

Mr. Dorian stated before any concrete decisions were made he suggested looking at the Florida Statutes again.

Chair Davis suggested that if Commissioners have questions or examples please give to staff so they may be discussed at the next meeting.

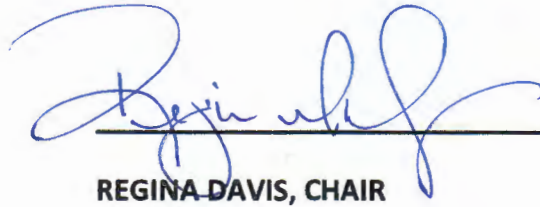
Consensus was for Commission is to give comments to staff by next week to be placed on the agenda for the January meeting.

✚ **Next Regular Meeting is Thursday, December 10, 2015 at 6:00 p.m.**

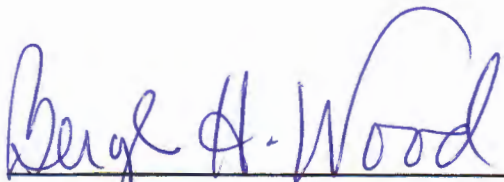
ADJOURNMENT OF MEETING

THERE BEING NO FURTHER BUSINESS TO COME BEFORE THE COMMISSION, THE CHAIR
DECLARED THE WORKSHOP ADJOURNED AT 7:43 P.M.

GADSDEN COUNTY, FLORIDA



REGINA DAVIS, CHAIR



BERYL H. WOOD, DEPUTY CLERK
For NICHOLAS THOMAS, CLERK
Gadsden County, Florida

