

**NEWBERRY COUNTY COUNCIL  
WORK SESSION  
MINUTES  
AUGUST 9, 2021**

Newberry County Council met on Monday, August 9, 2021, at 6:00 p.m. in Council Chambers at the Courthouse Annex, 1309 College Street, Newberry, S.C., for a called work session.

Notice of the work session was duly advertised as required by law.

**PRESENT:** Henry H. Livingston, III, Chairman  
Travis Reeder, Council Member  
Johnny Mack Scurry, Council Member  
Mary Arrowood, Council Member  
Les Hipp, Council Member  
Nick Shealy, Council Member  
Tony McDonald, Interim County Administrator  
A.J. Tothacer, Jr., County Attorney  
Karen Brehmer, Deputy County Administrator  
Taylor Davenport, Assistant to the County Administrator  
Susan C. Fellers, Clerk to Council

**ABSENT:** Todd Johnson, Vice-Chairman

**1. Call to Order**

Mr. Livingston called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

**2. Discussion of Solar Farms in Newberry County - Rick Farmer, Economic Development Director**

Mr. Farmer turned discussions over to the speakers in Agenda Item 3.

**3. Public Appearances**

**A. Stacey Washington, Energy Specialist, SC Energy Office - Solar in South Carolina.**

Attached hereto, and incorporated herein, is the power point presentation of Ms. Washington.

After her presentation, Council Members questioned her as to the end of life of the solar panels and the decommissioning process.

Ms. Washington advised the life expectancy of a panel is approximately 30-35 years. As long as the solar panel was intact, there would be no leakage of fluids into the soil. Solar panels are not to go into landfills and should not be left on the land after the life of the farm. The county would need to establish an ordinance to solar decommissioning. There is no data available as to contamination of the solar site but she was not aware of any in South Carolina.

Clearing trees for a solar farm would affect wildlife; although in other parts of the county, the panels have been lifted up with crops and animals under the panels.

Ms. Washington advised there are guidelines for storms.

She indicated the U.S. Department of Energy has studied solar farms in other countries.

**B. Mike Smith, USC and the Electric Cooperatives of South Carolina.**

Attached hereto, and incorporated herein, is a copy of the powerpoint presentation presented to Council by Mr. Smith.

After his presentations, Council asked about severe weather conditions, i.e., hail, tornados, etc. and standard design requirements.

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Mr. Smith advised that on the coast solar panels have to withstand hurricanes, however there is always a risk. A tornado would do damage.

Mr. Smith's response as to the need of batteries was that we could get away with not having energy storage. Spring is the best for solar panels. Utilities are becoming more complex. South Carolina has no regional transmission operation, and it is more expensive to add batteries.

There is minimal impact to the environment until decommissioning. DHEC is supposed to address concerns of decommissioning at the end of life.

In response to whether there were specifications in place to withstand expected tornados, Mr. Smith advised he could not answer that. The glass is pretty resistant to hail. He advised he would check into the industry standard for that.

In response to solar becoming standard and when, Mr. Smith advised that plants could not be built cheaper than solar. With solar, carbon-free energy is risk free but it has its costs. Solar will reduce electric bills. Industry is changing. Electric vehicles are cheaper to operate but could require the building of substations.

Mr. Smith advised they are working toward double efficiency, which would only need half the land.

Most solar sites are located near a main power line. Developers try to avoid building more power lines but there is a process in place, if needed.

#### **4. Public Comments (by those who have signed up at the meeting)**

**Bill Parr, 914 Belfast Road**, invested in residential solar 2 1/2 years ago and it is fantastic. The only maintenance they have done is after pollen season, they tried to wipe some of the pollen off. He felt it to be the best investment since building his house 26 years ago. His panels have a 25 year warranty. There are no moving parts. He also has batteries and is on the electric cooperative.

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**Mac Flores** with Ecoplexus passed out business cards to Council if they should have any questions of him.

**Chris Sandifer** was not able to make it.

**James Floyd, 1520 Boundary Street**, owns property on Island Ford Road which is adjacent to the subject property. This is a huge project and he has environmental concerns as well as disposal environmental concerns. He asked if Council had reviewed the financial documents of the company.

**Karl Brehmer** felt decommissioning to be a problem with no plan from DHEC in place at this time. This is a huge facility right next to a river. If 1% of the 450 acre site is damaged every year, that is 4 1/2 acres each year. There is no leakage as long as a the panel is intact. Ecoplexes is not asking for this; they have distanced themselves by forming an LLC to avoid liability. It will be the County's responsibility to resolve this issue. Adjoining landowners will suffer. This was characterized as hazardous material by Ms. Washington. This is going to cost a lot of money, and the risk is too great. The potential for failure is too high; cost is too high; and the County is not dealing with the right people. He felt Ecoplexus wanted to make a sale at his expense.

Mr. Otis Taylor, the landowner, asked to speak even though he did not sign up for public comments. Mr. Livingston advised that he would need to sign up for public comments at the next Council meeting.

Mr. Hipp stated that in all fairness we have allowed people to speak who did not sign up and it was unfair to not allow Mr. Taylor to speak. Council agreed to allow Mr. Taylor to speak.

**Otis Taylor** advised he was renting the land and the County would have no risks. If Duke Power goes bankrupt or doesn't want to buy power, that would be a risk. Shopping centers are built with an LLC. If the company goes bankrupt, there are bankruptcy laws. The bond is only \$50,000 and if they manage the risk for 50 years, there will be \$500,000 in escrow in case something comes up.

## 5. Comments/Requests from Council Members

Mr. Shealy expressed appreciation to the expert speakers and said Council has a lot of information to think about.

Mr. Hipp thanked the speakers for the professional input as well as the biased input from those opposed to this. This will provide more tax base than just agricultural. He toured the property and saw the nearest residence. If we close the door to this, we have closed the doors in Newberry County to solar projects.

Mrs. Arrowood thanked Ms. Washington and Mr. Smith for their professional opinions. She also thanked Mr. Farmer for getting unbiased information. She pointed out there would be a buffer around this location, too.

Mr. Scurry thanked everyone for the information. After reviewing the information, Council needs to determine what is best for the people of Newberry County and not the landowner.

Mr. Reeder thanked Mr. Farmer and the experts for answering questions. He also thanked the public for their opinions.

Mr. Livingston also thanked everyone. Mr. Livingston asked Mr. Smith of the 525,000 acres in solar farms in the state, are there any problems that have occurred that would be so-called catastrophic. Mr. Smith advised he would try to find out.

## 6. Adjournment

Mr. Shealy moved to adjourn; seconded by Mrs. Arrowood. Vote was unanimous.

Mr. Livingston declared the meeting adjourned at 7:42 p.m.

**NEWBERRY COUNTY COUNCIL**

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**Henry H. Livingston, III, Chairman**

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**Susan C. Fellers, Clerk to Council**

**Minutes Approved:** \_\_\_\_\_