

Community Speaks Solar Project

PHOTOS | DAMON STONE



▲ Linda Bridwell, the executive director of the Public Service Commission, started the meeting by presenting information pertaining to the case, being 2024-00337, and explaining the process of application. She clarified that the plant would have to plant native species of plants surrounding the facility, and there would need to be a decommissioning plan in place.



▲ Jim Stevens spoke out against the solar project, and explained that the construction vehicles and the site, along with the unmowed grass during the summertime, could severely limit visibility for drivers.



▲ Darrell Burks from Lawrenceburg said the solar farm would bring potential growth to the county and that the county would soon need to utilize alternative energy.



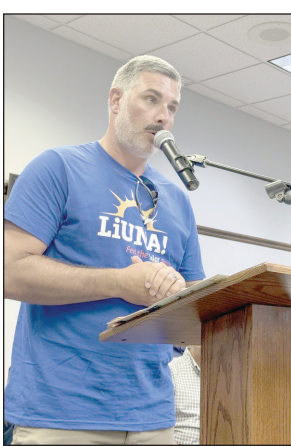
▲ Michelle Snyder shared details on a solar farm in Eagle Point, Oregon, and that solar panels in the area had caught fire, with toxic chemicals leaking into the area. Snyder echoed the concerns of the Amish, citing that the leak in Barren County would seep into the limestone at the Mammoth Cave watershed and would poison the water.



▲ David Hawkins explained the financial impact that such a plant would have on the housing market, citing an approximately 8.7% reduction for homes within the one mile. "We find evidence that local housing market activity declines after a solar farm becomes operational," Hawkins read from the report. "The number of homes sold in the nearby area falls by roughly 6%, suggesting reduced housing liquidity in the vicinity of the new solar facility."



▲ Lonnie Calvert spoke on behalf of the Laborer's International Union of North America Local 1392 out of Owensboro. Calvert cited that the plant would help with the "crumbling infrastructures" of the oil and coal energy industries.



▲ Terrell Renfro was another representative of the LIUNA, and he stated that the solar project would bring local jobs to the area.



▲ Margie Dawsey spoke on behalf of the Old Order Amish Community from Park City, sharing their concerns that a solar farm would deter deer migration patterns, and could potentially starve them. Dawsey shared that they feared the chemicals and minerals used to construct the solar farm could seep into the ground, contaminating it.



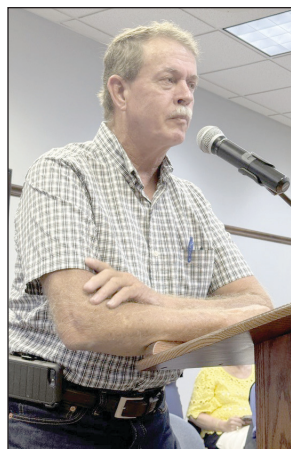
▲ Chelene Nightingale used to represent a solar company out of Los Angeles, California, and she explained that independent studies have found that proximity to a solar plant can lead to an increase of headaches, dizziness, nausea and potentially cancer. Nightingale added that a safer alternative to solar would be nuclear energy, citing France as an example of a country that safely utilizes nuclear energy.



▲ Avery Matney owns property adjoining the proposed site, and explained that should Wood Duck sell the site to another company, the cost of decommissioning would fall to the county and landowners.



▲ Paula Pedigo is the leading advocate against the project, citing how Wood Duck Solar and Geenex have not been transparent with government organizations, and that they have been left in the dark, citing another Geenex plant, Bluebird, which had been sold off to another company.



▲ David Pedigo spoke near the end of the meeting, offering an alternative location for Wood Duck, being that of wastelands affected by coal mining. He explained that land that is unusable for living or agriculture could see a second life as a location for such facilities.



Community members were able to share their opinions surrounding the proposal for the Wood Duck Solar plant, which is planned to be built in the northwestern region of Barren County. They were able to share their opinions, findings and concerns surrounding the plant.

REGIONAL NEWS

By **Damon Stone**
Freelance Writer

Community members were able to voice their concerns surrounding the proposal for Wood Duck Solar to construct a new solar farm in the northwestern region of Barren County.

Linda Bridwell, executive director of the Public Service Commission, started the meeting by presenting information pertaining to the case, being case number 2024-00337, and explaining the process of application.

Bridwell explained the solar project would be required to plant native species around the project area to preserve the scenic surroundings, limit construction hours, typically being from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., repair damage to roads or bridges, provide specific decommissioning plans that require land restoration, and bond with the counties for the project life to ensure said decommissioning.

A decommissioning plan is a detailed strategy that lays out procedures for the safe removal of a facility or infrastructure once its operations cease.

Bridwell clarified that the siting board does not review if the project is the best use of the land, or any alternative locations for the project.

One person that spoke in favor of the solar project was Lonnie Calvert, speaking on behalf of the Laborer's International Union of North America (LIUNA) Local 1392 out of Owensboro, Kentucky.

Calvert explained the goal would be to help with potential energy shortages as coal and oil fade away over time through "crumbling infrastructures."

A Barren County local, Jim Stevens, listed several roads that the glare would affect, utilizing his time as a bus driver for Barren County Schools.

Stevens explained that the roads in the area where the project is proposed would not be good enough to support the needs of traffic that would come as a result. Additionally, he said roads that aren't mowed in the summertime along with the construction vehicles to build the solar farm and with the glare from the panels would make traveling on affected roads dangerous.

Paula Pedigo, the leading advocate against the project, cited how Wood Duck, and their parent company Geenex, seemed shady in their transparency, stating how it has been done in the dark with both local and state government officials, with each claiming that the other side had approved it.

"So you got finger points going both ways," Pedigo said.

Pedigo stated that Geenex had created five other solar projects in Kentucky, one called Blue Bird in Harrison County, that had been sold to another company based out of California before it started producing energy. She also said another project by Geenex called Wood Pecker is "still brewing right here in Barren County."

Darrell Burks from Lawrenceburg, Kentucky, but born and raised in Barren County, spoke in favor of the plant, citing it as potential growth for the county using alternative energy, and said the county would be running out of coal and oil energy.

Another representative of the LIUNA, Terrell Renfro, spoke on the site being able to provide local jobs, by utilizing local programs to recruit workers trained to complete the job, while offering permanent career paths.

Renfro added that the wages for such a project would be \$30 per hour, with the revenue going back into the community.

Margie Dawsey spoke on behalf of the Old Order Amish Community from Park City, reading letters written and one being signed by over fifty of its members. Letters from the Amish community surrounded fears that chemicals and minerals used in the construction process would

runoff and could damage the surrounding land. It was stated the solar panels would completely surround their home.

Dawsey explained how the Amish were gentle people who lived off the land, relying on deer season every November, and that a solar plant would disrupt and deter deer migrations, as well as meals prepared from fishing if waterways were contaminated. These were just a few examples of ways they state their way of life would be forever changed.

"The way I see it, and I want you to think about this, if they put solar panels all around the way of our farm with six to ten feet chain length fences, there will be no more deer, which means Wood Duck Solar will literally be taking good, healthy, God-given food out of the mouths of our children," the Amish state in their letter.

Additionally, Dawsey explained that the solar panels collecting sunlight would increase the temperature, and without air conditioning, it would heat up the area to "unbearable" temperatures, as stated in the letter.

Adding onto Dawsey's statements regarding the heat, Michelle Snyder, who has moved to the area from near Eagle Point, Oregon, recalled that a solar plant had been installed there, and the overabundant heat had set the solar panels on fire, releasing toxic chemicals. She said it burned for four days with local fire departments not knowing how to extinguish the fire and locals having to shelter in place due to the toxicity in the air.

Snyder explained that due to the limestone within the ground below the projected solar site, the chemicals would leak into the Mammoth Cave watershed and poison water in the area.

Mammoth Cave raised concerns in April in a letter submitted to the PSC noting Geenex had not satisfied the park's concerns over the potential for harmful pollutants leaking into the watershed of the cave system. Mammoth Cave voiced its opposition to the project at that time.

Snyder also retorted that the power grid is well put together, citing how she talked with Farmers RECC who stated that, and that she was working with the TVA on other alternative energy resources.

Similarly, Chelene Nightingale spoke at the meeting, explaining that she used to represent a solar company out of Los Angeles, California, and she referenced how several independent studies reported that those living near such plants would cause headaches, dizziness, nausea and an increase of cancer.

Nightingale explained that the EPA and DOJ announced \$1 million for penalties for companies that pollute water, having found that solar companies polluted water the most, especially during the manufacturing process.

Nightingale added that nuclear energy would be a safer solution, citing France as having utilized such nuclear plants, with no issues.

Avery Matney, the owner of a farm adjoining the affected property and who represents the people of Metcalfe County on their solar site committee, explained that the decommissioning process could impact the county and landowners, as they would have to pay for it, should Wood Duck collapse or sell the site.

Matney said there are "major discrepancies and assertions that must be addressed" between the decommissioning plan submitted to the PSC siting board and the plan submitted with the Barren County Clerk's office.

Some of those discrepancies, Matney said, include one having listed a time frame and one does not, as well as who would be responsible for the decommissioning, with one plan stating Wood Duck and the other making reference to the tenants (landowners) as potentially being the responsible party.

Matney expressed that an accurate decommission plan is crucial for transparency,

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