



COUNTY OF ALBEMARLE
AGRICULTURAL-FORESTAL DISTRICTS ADVISORY
COMMITTEE

<p>PROJECT NAME: SP202200014 Woodridge Solar Substation SP202200015 Woodridge Solar</p> <p>SUBJECT/PROPOSAL/REQUEST: SP202200014: A new electrical substation for transmission of power generated by the solar energy system proposed in SP202200015 SP202200015: Solar-energy electrical generation facility, with photovoltaic panels and related equipment occupying approximately 1,500 acres</p> <p>STAFF CONTACT: Scott Clark</p>	<p>AGENDA DATE: July 6th, 2022</p> <p>ATTACHMENTS: Yes</p>
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BACKGROUND:

The subject property (Tax Map 114 Parcels 51, 55, 56, 58, 65, 68, 69, 70; Tax Map 115 Parcel 10) includes 2,259 acres, and is located between Blenheim (to the west) and Woodridge (to the east). The majority of the site has been used for pine plantations for several decades, and most of the area proposed for the solar use has been recently clear-cut.

The property is adjacent to the Carter's Bridge Agricultural/Forestal District (see Attachment A). The adjacent District parcels are Tax Map 114 Parcels 57, 57C and 57D.

On the 2,259-acre property, the application proposes a total disturbed area of 1,500 acres. Within that disturbed area, approximately 650 acres would be occupied by solar panels. The site would be graded to create slopes that would accommodate the solar-panel layout. Disturbed areas would be seeded for grasses around the panels themselves, and for pollinator-hosting plants elsewhere within the disturbed area. (See Attachment B for the details of the proposed conceptual plan.) This facility requires special use permit approval from the Board of Supervisors.

COMMITTEE REVIEW GUIDELINES:

Section 3-202(D) of the Albemarle County Code reads as follows:

D. Consideration of district in taking certain actions. The county shall consider the existence of a district and the purposes of this chapter and Chapter 43 of Title 15.2 of the Virginia Code in its comprehensive plan, ordinances, land use planning decisions, administrative decisions and procedures affecting parcels of land adjacent to the district.

The County's practice has been to consult with the Committee on any special use permit requests located on land adjacent to an existing District.

Those purposes of the Agricultural-Forestal Districts chapter of the County Code are listed in Section 3-100, "Purpose and Intent":

The purpose and intent of this chapter are as follows:

A. It is the policy of county to conserve and protect, and to encourage the development and improvement of, its agricultural and forestal lands for the production of food and other agricultural or forestal products. It is also the policy of the county to conserve and protect agricultural and forestal lands as valued natural and ecological resources which provide essential open spaces for clean airsheds, watershed protection, wildlife habitat, and for aesthetic purposes.

B. It is the purpose and intent of this chapter to provide means by which agricultural and forestal lands of either statewide or local significance may be protected and enhanced as a viable segment of state and local economies, and as important economic and environmental resources.

The Committee's role is to advise the Board of Supervisors specifically on possible impacts from this proposed use to the Carter's Bridge district. Other impacts to the site and surrounding area will be assessed by other reviewers and addressed in staff's report to the Planning Commission.

The Committee's recommendation will be included in staff's reports to the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors before the public hearings are held for this item.

DISCUSSION:

Section 3-101 of the County Code further explains the County policies that the Districts should promote. Staff will address this proposal's impacts on each policy below:

A. Production of food and other agricultural and forestal products. It is the policy of the State and the County to conserve and protect and to encourage the development and improvement of the Commonwealth's agricultural and forestal lands for the production of food and other agricultural and forestal products.

The presence of a solar energy facility on a parcel that is outside the District would not limit the capacity of land in the District to produce agricultural or forestal products. Staff is still evaluating the potential traffic impacts of the proposed use. However, the traffic impacts would only occur during the construction period (12-18 months), and very little traffic would be generated during the rest of the lifetime of the facility.

B. Provide essential open spaces. It is also the policy of the State and the County to conserve and protect agricultural and forestal lands as valued natural and ecological resources which provide essential open spaces for clean air sheds, watershed protection, wildlife habitat, as well as for aesthetic purposes.

Construction of a solar facility would not directly affect open-space protection on the adjacent District parcels. As the solar-project parcels have been used for pine plantations and large portions have recently been clear-cut, the proposed solar facility would not add to forest fragmentation in the area.

C. Strong agricultural and forestal economy. It is the policy of the County to support a strong agricultural and forestal economy.

A solar facility on an adjacent property does not impede the District's ability to support agricultural or forestal production. (The issue of the use's impacts on rural land uses in the area in general will be addressed in the overall special use permit review.)

D. Protect and preserve natural resources and retain continuous and unfragmented land. It is the policy of the County to protect and preserve natural resources, which include mountains, hills, valleys, rivers, streams, groundwater, and retain continuous and unfragmented land for agriculture, forestry, biodiversity, and natural resource protection.

Development of the site would not create fragmentation of land ownership or of land cover within the district. The parcel's location adjacent to a major highway make its value to landscape connectivity minimal.

RECOMMENDATION:

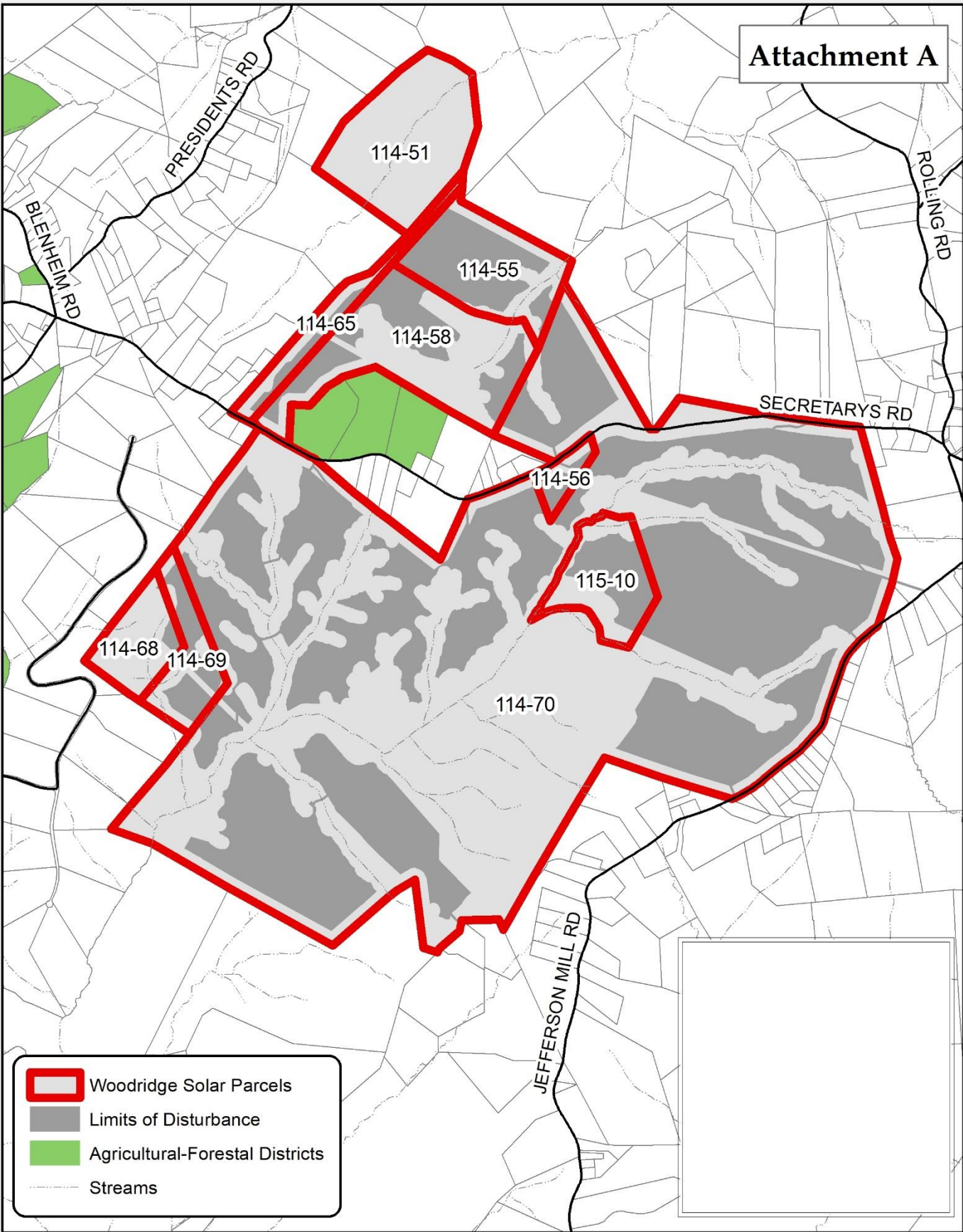
While the proposed use would have significant impacts on its site that would need to be managed through site design and conditions of approval, it is not expected to impact agricultural resources on the adjacent land in the District.

Therefore, staff recommends that the Committee advise the Board and the Planning Commission that the proposed use does not conflict with the purposes of the Agricultural-Forestal Districts.

ATTACHMENTS:

- A – Location Map
- B – [Concept Plan](#)

Attachment A



SP 22-14, 22-15 Woodridge Solar

