

LAMAR COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
PUBLIC HEARING
February 16th, 2021
6:00 p.m.

I. Call to Order

Chairman Charles Glass called the meeting to order at approximately 6:00 p.m. Present for the meeting were Chairman Charles Glass, Vice-Chairman Horton, Commissioner Heiney, Commissioner Traylor, Commissioner Thrash, County Administrator Townsend, and County Clerk Carlette Davidson.

II. Special Exception Request by TMJ Investments, LLC-Crawley Road

Planning and Community Development Director Buice stated that the Special Exception is for a request on Crawley Road, Tax Map 017, Parcels 22 and 42. She said that the applicant is TMJ Investments with Mark McCook as the agent. Planning and Community Development Director Buice stated that TMJ Investments, LLC owns 134 acres on Crawley Road and on the other side of Cottage Road which is an abandoned County Road. She said that they have applied for a special exception for a solar panel farm. Planning and Community Development Director Buice stated that if the special exception is approved this parcel will be taxed as commercial but not zoned as commercial according to the Chief Appraiser. She said that the proposal is for a little over 83,000 solar panels which will generate about 35,000 kilowatts of power. Planning and Community Development Director Buice stated that the Board of Appeals recommended denial of the application. She said that the concerns of the adjoining property owners fell into two categories; environmental and aesthetic concerns. She said that if the application is approved, she has proposed conditions including the width of the natural buffer, the location of a natural vegetative buffer, and the length of time provided to the property owner to remove the infrastructure installed once the solar farm is decommissioned which is generally 12 to 36 months.

Solar Panel Presentation

Christopher Powell stated that they had a presentation of the entire solar panel set up so that they would know what they are talking about. County Administrator Townsend gave him host privileges so that they could show the presentation via Zoom.

Mr. Chris McCook of Global Solar Energy, LLC, 33.3 MW Solar Farm, Georgia Power presented a presentation about a solar panel farm.

He said that this is for a solar panel farm with 133 acres. He showed a preliminary plat (attached to the minutes). He showed an actual product of the finished project

showing that the grass will be actively growing. He gave an overview of what is a solar panel farm. He said that it is utilizing the land according to grade and formation. Mr. McCook showed a picture of the final product once it is finished with solar panels and grass growing between the panels. Mr. McCook said that a solar panel farm is appealing to landowners and to the developers and everyone involved because there is very minimal grading and is a collection of solar panels sitting on top of galvanized steel I-beams driven into the ground. He said that this is why they are so great for environmental concerns.

Mr. McCook said that they are proposing 81,360 solar panels. He said that it will produce 33,300 kilowatts of power. Mr. McCook said that the tree buffer will get larger and create a complete barrier for the field. He said that there are no grass or erosion issues. Mr. McCook said that it is the green alternative to fossil fuel power which is the biggest track for the Country. He said that it generates reliable, clean electricity. Mr. McCook said that it helps to create stable prices where fossil fuel fluctuates heavily. He said that one of the many reasons that renewable resources are needed is because solar is a natural alternative to nuclear energy and fossil fuels in general and said that it actually works. He said that it is a great alternative, it is clean and sustainable and it is safe.

Mr. McCook said that the life span of a solar panel farm is 40 years according to the manufacturers. He said that the solar panels are 76 percent glass, 10 percent plastic, 8 percent aluminum, 5 percent silicon, and 1 percent metal.

Mr. McCook said that some of the benefits to the community are labor based. He said that local labor is used in many cases which brings jobs to the community. He said that as far as the maintenance of the solar panel farm, the biggest aspect for the life of the farm is grass cutting, weed eating, and a lot of manual maintenance in the fields to keep down on the herbicides. Mr. McCook stated that sheep are also utilized on solar panel farms and marketed for their meat in conjunction with the farmers according to the safety of the solar farm panels.

Chairman Glass asked about the type of film used in the panels that would be used for this particular solar panel farm. Mr. Powell stated that they would be using silicon-based film.

Mr. McCook said that some of the main concerns that have been brought to their attention have been related to pollution of groundwater and surface water and said that either way it will not be an issue. He said that with the pollution aspect, there are no pollutants to contaminate the water. Mr. McCook said that with the erosion, there is a minimal amount of clearing and soil disturbance. He said that the panels will be driven into the ground directly through the grass. Mr. McCook said that there are very stringent requirements on erosion with the Environmental Protection Division (EPD). He said that every day they watch sediment ponds and silt fences and they have Engineers to elevate all concerns regarding erosion, and water run-offs. He said that everything such as this will be heavily managed every

day by the EPD and the Engineers. Mr. McCook mentioned that they provide maintenance to their other solar fields and erosion is one of the main things that they do. He said that every solar panel farm is their biggest concern and priority. He said that when the rainwater comes through or even snow like they are dealing with in the North, there are crews heavily staffed onsite. Mr. McCook said that as soon as the rains are over, they are addressing any issues that pop up.

Mr. McCook said that with the pollution of the water one of the biggest aspects for him, and if he was a neighbor, is the fact that this property has been in farming for as long as he has been alive. He said that regarding spraying a field that size, 130 acres, it is going to get sprayed twice a year, minimum, for herbicides to burn down the foliage before they plant. Mr. McCook said that this is 6000 gallons a year of chemicals and highly restricted chemicals that are sprayed on the field with zero regulations. He said that no one is regulating the output or anything. He said that they are cutting back tremendously on chemicals that have already been put in the ground by farmers. Mr. McCook said that these are low estimated numbers.

Commissioner Heiney said that this is not true. Mr. McCook tried to respond but Chairman Glass asked for McCook to hold his comments and move on with his presentation.

Mr. McCook went on to say that the second issue he heard about with the solar panel farms was related to glare. He said that he did not have concerns with the glare because the panels that they are installing are integrated with anti-glare technology. Mr. McCook said that they have agreed to put in a privacy buffer everywhere the field is visible and said that there should be no issue with the glare.

Mr. McCook said that property values were an area of concern. He said that he is heavily versed in real estate and his wife is a licensed real estate agent. He said that property values are based on many solar panel farms across the State, the closest one is near his home in Pike County, and the area around that solar panel farm is the highest acreage of the entire County. Mr. McCook said that there is land selling for \$12,000.00 to \$15,000.00 an acre next to these solar panel fields. He said that the land value is not an area of concern because they have zero impact on property values.

Mr. McCook said that the noise issue with the solar panel farm has been brought up and the panels are virtually noiseless. He said that heat generation was an area of concern and said that his firsthand experience, with maintaining solar fields, is that there is very little heat that comes from the panels. He said that there is no more heat on a solar panel farm than there is on a wheat field.

Mr. McCook said that there was a small amount of concern with Crawley Road. He said that their traffic will be beyond minimal on Crawley Road. He said that

the entrance to their field, when you come across the railroad tracks off of Old Hwy 41, is straight across Crawley Road and straight into the field. He said that there will be no vehicles parked on the side of the road and there will be no blockages of the road.

Mr. McCook said that the biggest point based on the facts he has made is that there are no negative effects to the property or the neighbors. He said that it is a tremendous plus for the County not only based on tax revenue but also because it gives millions of tax dollars in tax revenue that virtually have no burden on the County. Mr. McCook said that there is no road wear and no school cost which is a very big plus for the County. He said that for this particular field this is the best use of the property. Mr. McCook said that this is far less imposing than any residential subdivision or any other industrial development.

Commissioner Heiney said that he wanted to make a minor point. He said that for the most part he did not have any problem with his presentation but said that he was incorrect when he talks about pesticides and herbicides because that was his business. Commissioner Heiney said that pesticides and herbicides have to be applied by law by certified applicators and they have to be trained and certified. He said that they have to maintain that training through educational classes. He said that a certain amount has to be put down on the land and it is done on a formulated basis according to a prescription label. Commissioner Heiney said that when he says that it is kind of dumped on there you are wrong and said that he should remove that from his presentation. Mr. McCook responded by saying that he has a collaborative pesticide license and he has been through the course. Commissioner Heiney asked him why he was saying this. Mr. McCook said that the fact is that it is unregulated. Commissioner Heiney asked Mr. McCook what he meant by unregulated. He said that it is unregulated because no one is inspecting what you put down per acre and there are no engineers involved with what you are putting them down. Mr. McCook said that it is simply a person going to the University of Georgia (UGA) extension. Commissioner Heiney said that every purchase that they make is recorded by the State. He said that if they put down too much then this shows up on record. Commissioner Heiney and Mr. McCook were at a difference in beliefs and Chairman Glass said that the application of herbicides was not the main issue.

Mr. Powell presented an actual solar panel and said that it was made out of 76 percent glass with an antiglare applied to it so no reflection could harm any birds or anything else. He said that the frame is made of aluminum and pointed to the actual cells on the panel that converts the sun's energy into electric energy. Mr. Powell pointed to the tracks that are one percent metal and are used to connect the cells together. He said that if you look behind it there are wires that connect to each other. Mr. Powell said that everything is contained in the panel and there is no way for anything to escape into the environment and cause any damage to the ground.

Commissioner Traylor asked where the panels were manufactured. Mr. Powell responded that the panels were manufactured in Georgia but mainly solar panels are manufactured in China. He said that some are assembled in the United States of America (USA). He said that for the most part, China is the biggest manufacturer of solar panel cells.

Public Comments

Perian Calhoun of 1135 Pine Valley Road, Griffin Georgia addressed the board. Mr. Calhoun said that he and his wife are building a house on the Northeast portion of the property, on Ridgeway Road, where the solar panel farm will be. He said that they decided to move into this community. Mr. Calhoun said his kids are excited about being in the Country. He said that he wants this to be their forever home. He said that a picture is worth a thousand words and he has looked at the totality of things and preventive measures. Mr. Calhoun pulled the horse picture off of the Lamar County website and said that you see farmland and horses. He said that it is inviting and, on the website, it says, "Home is Just Better Here". Mr. Calhoun said that this is where his family wants to be. He said that you do not see solar panels or other types of energy on the website. Mr. Calhoun said that the house that they are building has a view of the field from his kid's bedroom and you see beautiful pasture. He said that next door is where the solar panel farm will be and if his kids are waking up every morning this is what they will see. Mr. Calhoun said that the property is going uphill and it is not flat land. He said that when his kids are looking out of that window, they will see wildlife and peaceful farmland. He said that with the solar panel farm you will see solar panels every day and he does not want them to wake up to that. Mr. Calhoun said that his dining room is facing the property where the solar panel farm is going to be. He said that when he is eating breakfast, lunch, and dinner he does not want to look at a solar panel farm. Mr. Calhoun said that you can see that they are going to put trees and a buffer there and said again that the property going up a hill and you will still be able to see it. Mr. Calhoun asked the board if they would want their family exposed to that; your kids and grandkids.

Mr. Calhoun said that he wondered what type of effect that severe weather has on the panels. He said that obviously, the solar panels need sun. Mr. Calhoun said that he did some research and found some studies that said that lightning causes about 32 percent damage to solar panels due to solar radiation and due to being exposed without trees or objects of great height around them. He said that this is for direct lightning strikes to the solar panels and they will need to be replaced each and every time. He said that the indirect lightning strikes around the solar panels and the surrounding area happen more frequently and could lead to house fires, power outages, and household electric devices being destroyed. Mr. Calhoun asked what would happen if a tornado came through that property since you have 80,000 solar panels on the farm. He said that Lamar County averages about two tornados each year and based on the historical patterns there is a risk. He said that there are thunderstorms in Georgia all of the time. Mr. Calhoun asked

what happens if the solar panels are destroyed and the metal is scattered on the ground and gets into the water source.

Mr. Calhoun said that the last point he wanted to make was about the cleaning of the solar panels. He said that it is true that you can clean them with water for dirt but asked how do they clean them if there are bird droppings and other substances that get on them. Mr. Calhoun said that any search engine will tell you that it takes more to clean them than water and you will need some type of chemical solution or soap to clean them. He said that then there is a potential for ground runoff to the water source. Mr. Calhoun asked the board to look at the big picture and asked them if they would want a solar panel farm next to them and do they want their kids and grandkids exposed to this and asked that they consider the things that he is showing them. Mr. Calhoun said that the decisions that the board makes and approves have lifelong implications. He said that the Board of Appeals denied the request and asked that the board take this into consideration and not approve this special exception.

Dwight Fleming of 1011 Van Buren Road addressed the board and stated that he was a board member on the Planning Commission board but said that he was not there in that capacity but there as an individual citizen. Mr. Fleming said that his family has been involved with the construction and maintenance of twenty or more solar panel farms for a number of years. He said that they had managed the construction on projects up to 2200 acres. He said that the regulations that a solar panel developer has to go through and meet are super stringent. Mr. Fleming said that they finished a project in Taylor County where the original contractor destroyed the wetlands. He said that Georgia Power and First Solar paid almost a million dollars for them to come in and restore the wetlands. Mr. Fleming said that they are doing a project in Twiggs County that is on 22 acres and he has a ten-man crew at that project and every day that it rains they are addressing issues such as a silt fence being washed out. He said that the State EPD and the Federal EPA and in some cases the Army Core of Engineers are all over these projects.

Mr. Fleming said that there will be no increased runoff going into the surrounding area. He said that there will be no more rainfall on this property after the solar panels are built than before they are built. Mr. Fleming said that the water may fall on a solar panel but it will run off and hit the ground. He said that there will not be any increased runoff and there will be no increased quality of ground cover on that property than there is right now. Mr. Fleming said that there is nothing to contaminate the groundwater. He said that no lead is going to leach out of the solar panels and get into the groundwater. Mr. Fleming said that there are solar panel farms all over the Country and there has been no report on the news about solar panels getting picked up by a tornado. He said that it is possible but he has yet to see it. Mr. Fleming said that every incidence that he knows of, where solar panels are cleaned, other than a soft brush and water, are done with biodegradable cleaners. He said that the bird droppings that are there now are going to be the same after the solar panel farm is built. He said that there will be no increase

runoff from the bird droppings. Mr. Fleming said that he heard a comment that half a million birds a year get killed by solar panels. He said that this is misinformation because the birds are killed in windmill incidences but not in solar panels especially with the non-glare solar panels. Mr. Fleming said that it is not like when you see a bird fly into your window at home because he is seeing his reflection. He said that this will not happen.

Mr. Fleming stated that a very conservative effort of what the tax contribution that this project would bring was prepared by the Tax Assessor. He said that the Tax Assessor told him that it would be around \$135,000.00 and is a very conservative estimate of what the property tax contribution would be. Mr. Fleming said that he feels like that estimate is probably double. He said that it is a source that requires no County resources where it cost \$9,000.00 a year to educate a child. He said that you would have to have a very substantially priced house to contribute enough money to educate two kids. Mr. Fleming said that this is going to do nothing but put money in the coffer and require no outlay in the school system on the part of the solar farm. He said that from that standpoint he believes it is a win-win for the County. Mr. Fleming said that the land where the solar farm will be located is valued at \$10,000.00 per acre. He said that every surrounding property owner in that area with substantial acreage would be tickled to death to get their land sold at \$10,000.00 an acre. Mr. Fleming said that this is what is happening in a lot of the areas with a huge concentration of solar panel farms. He said that the property value is going up.

Mr. Fleming said that one thing that has not been brought up, at any of the meetings, is the noise from the railroad. He said that he had much rather have a little bit of noise from a solar panel farm than he had from the noise of a train whistle. Mr. Fleming said that after a while you do not hear the trains and he thinks what will happen is, after a while, they will forget that a solar panel farm is there. Mr. Fleming said that he would rather have the solar panel farm as a neighbor than a subdivision on 136 acres with two or three houses per acre. He said that this is clean energy and it is a clean industry. He said that there is no smoke. Mr. Fleming said that this is going to be one of the top taxpayers in the County. He said that depending on the ultimate engineering, where the property is located, will conceivably be one of the number one taxpayer for the County.

Randy Buffington of 478 Tom Bell Road addressed the board. Mr. Buffington said that it will not help his property value and he is against it.

Commissioner Traylor addressed Mr. Fleming and said that he pulled up on his laptop computer a solar farm in Twiggs County. He asked Mr. Fleming if he could tell him what was around that 2,000-acre property in Twiggs County. Mr. Fleming responded that most of it are rural. Commissioner Traylor stated that the picture does not show many houses around it. Mr. Fleming said that it is more rural than this area is in Lamar County. Commissioner Traylor said that it appeared to be in an Industrial Park.

Eddie Felton of 290 McCollum Road addressed the board. Mr. Fleming said that he was present on behalf of the Board of Appeals and the reason why they denied the special exception application is because of the concerns of the people who live in that community. He said that the questions that were asked about this project were not answered properly as for as the people were concerned.

Jerry Messer of 428 Crawley Road addressed the board. Mr. Messer said he lives where you turn off of Hwy 41 onto Cottage Road and you go over the railroad tracks and turn right. He said that his property butts up to where they want to put the solar panels. Mr. Messer said he had a question for the gentleman that was speaking about safety and the crews working on the solar panel farm and asked him if he was going to be the one that is going to be installing these solar panels. Mr. Fleming replied that he had no idea and said that he had no connection with the property.

Mr. Messer said that he moved to Lamar County 33 years ago from Riverdale but he was raised in Griffin, Georgia. He said that he married his wife and they had a couple of kids. He said that he bought his property because he liked it. Mr. Messer said that you can walk out in the yard and see deer and turkeys any time you wanted to and said that you still can. He said that he raised his kids there and he wants them to be able to raise their kids there in that same environment. Mr. Messer said that this is not the first time that they have been through things when there was a different board. He said that they were going to put in a gas terminal and they were going to transfer LP gas in a boxcar and unload it in the trucks. Mr. Messer said that they got this stopped because it is dangerous. He said that he has been in maintenance for 40 years and the solar panels are man-made and they are mechanical. Mr. Messer said that anything that you have that is mechanical has a possibility of failure. He said that parts on a car do not last forever. He said that anything mechanical will break down. Mr. Messer said that he is on a well and he is concerned about his water. He said that he does not want to walk out in his front yard or his back deck and see the solar panels. Mr. Messer said that he does not have anything against solar panels as long as they are somewhere else and said that they can put the panels near the board members' house because he does not want them there. Mr. Messer said that if he has to, he will get out of Lamar County. He said that the property value will go down but not tax-wise because you are still going to pay the same property taxes. Mr. Messer said that no one will pay fair market value on a house where all you see is solar panels. He said that you will not be able to sell it for what he has in it. Mr. Messer said that he is against it.

Gail Messer of 428 Crawley Road addressed the board. Mrs. Messer said that they have lived there for 33 years and raised their girls there. She said that they want to see their grandkids raised there. Mrs. Messer said that she brought her granddaughter there and she wants the board to see that this is her future; walking out and seeing lush land. She said that she wants herself and her grandson to

experience country living. She said wildlife; turkey, and deer. She said that she has seen some National Geographic moments in that field where they are talking about putting the solar panels. She said that she has seen some awesome sites in that 33 years and she wants to maintain it and for it to always be there. Mrs. Messer said that she has a lot of questions about where they got their information from. She said that they make it sound great, and grand, and asked if this information comes from the experts that the County has hired. Mrs. Messer said that she has been told that the solar panels produce light at nighttime and asked if they do how illuminated are the solar panels going to be because she is within 300 ft. of these solar panels. She said that her bedroom looks over the fields and every door she walks out of and every window in her house that she looks out of the solar panels are going to be her view. Mrs. Messer said that they are hard-working poor people and asked the board to please vote against this. Mrs. Messer said that the board could go home tonight after the meeting and they do not have to think about this anymore but she has to live with their decision the rest of her entire life because she does not plan to leave. Mrs. Messer said that she is concerned with the resale value of her property. She said that what she could sell it for today and what she could sell it for in a year will be different and said that it will not be for her good either. Mrs. Messer asked the board to consider every one of them in the meeting and not just the tax dollars that this will bring.

Joy Wisener of 430 Crawley Road addressed the board. Ms. Wisener said that she had lived there for 30 years raising her children and grandchildren. She said that she enjoyed the country life. She said that she lives next to her sister and brother-in-law and one other family that is right below them. Ms. Wisener said that she is concerned about a lot of things including the health problems that this could cause. She said that they do not know what it will do to the water situation. She said that there has already been a lot of clear off on the land and they have been able to tell this because the water runoff is in their dirt road. Ms. Wisener said that it is a mud slick every time it rains and she is always having to call the County to scrape it off and put it in the gravel. Ms. Wisener said that people come down that road and they do not realize it is a dead-end street. Ms. Wisener said that she has asked for a sign to be put up but they have not. She said that people are always turning around in her driveway. Ms. Wisener said that her neighbor, Mrs. Holloway's driveway goes on down a little further and she has seen people standing on her front porch because they have gone on down to her house. She said that she has a fence and a gate there. Ms. Wisener said that when they stop in her yard they turn around in her yard because there is no other place to go. Ms. Wisener said that a lot of people in the County come down that road out of curiosity. Ms. Wisener said that it causes a problem with them turning around in her yard. Ms. Wisener said that they have already seen the wildlife decrease because of the land that has already been cleared off. Ms. Wisener said that the solar panel farm is about 100 ft. from their house. She said that every time that they go down the road, which is one quarter to one half a mile, they will see those glass solar panels and not the lush woods.

Ms. Wisener said that she is totally against it. She said that she has a severely autistic granddaughter that she has raised in her house and this is the only house that she has known. Ms. Wisener said that two years ago her husband died and her granddaughter went to live with her mother. She said that she is severely traumatized by any type of situation in her life that changes and said that it affects her. Ms. Wisener said that she does not want her to be scared to come down the road to see her grandmother and then she cannot see her. Ms. Wisener said that she lives on her husband's social security and said that she does not have money to relocate. Ms. Wisener said that she calls her every day and says that she wants to come to grandma's house and says that she wants to come home. Ms. Wisener said that this is the only house that she has been raised in other than her mother's. She said that she cannot live with this and she hopes that they take this into consideration because it is not just the people at the meeting that they see that this affects. Ms. Wisener said that they live their life around her granddaughter. Ms. Wisener begged the board to reconsider their decision. She said that it is not going in those people's yards, it is going in their yards. Ms. Wisener said that every time their grandchildren go out in the yard to play that is what they are going to see. Ms. Wisener said that she begged them to reconsider.

Edward Bistany of 1135 Pine Valley Road, Griffin addressed the board. Mr. Bistany said that his property butts up to the proposed solar panel farm. Mr. Bistany asked the board how many of them had been to the site; everyone raised their hands. He asked if they had stood on Ridgeway Road and gone up to the old Cottage Road; all the way up. Commissioner Thrash said that she had. Mr. Bistany said that she understands the drop from Crawly Road down is an excessive 60 ft. drop. Mr. Bistany said that it drops down not just in one direction and it is thin and it spreads out. He said that it goes to the East Southeast to the South and to the West South West to the South and to the East and to the East South East. He said that he is talking about where the property slopes down on Crawley road. Mr. Bistany said towards Ridgeway Road, towards Morgan Dairy Road, and in that direction. He said that you can look at it on a topographic map and you can see the elevation dropping all the way down.

Mr. Bistany showed pictures that he had after the rainstorm Sunday night. He said that the picture is looking towards the South from his property towards the solar panel farm property. Mr. Bistany said that you could see the distribution of the rain. He said that this is very close to David Key's property and is right beside Cottage Road. Mr. Bistany said that the next picture, he showed to the board, is looking towards the South. He said that his next-door neighbor, Mr. Key owns 102 acres and they share Cottage Road. Mr. Bistany said that they could see from the pictures that this is not a small problem. He showed the board a picture of a solar panel farm in Texas and another one in California. He said that something that jumps out at you right away is the property. Mr. Bistany said that the majority of the solar panel farms in Twiggs and Taylor County and other places in South Georgia, the Florida Panhandle, and New Mexico are put on flat land for a reason. He said that if you take 81,000 solar panels which are approximately 3 x 5

umbrellas. He said that the environmentalist says that it creates a channeling effect so you have numerous amounts of channels of water. Mr. Bistany said that you cannot increase the water supply on a 130-acre piece of property and it is what it is when it rains. Mr. Bistany said that they have three-, five-, and seven-inch rainfalls and with all these sections it creates a channeling effect and now you have a runoff. He said that instead of being distributed equally, over 130 acres, now you are channeling. Mr. Bistany said that his son-in-law, Mr. Calhoun, gave his address earlier because they are living with them while they build their house. He said that he did some research and read an article from Community Solar. He said that there is a community that all agrees to have a solar panel farm and the electricity goes directly to those homes. He said that in this situation, it is strictly done for revenue. They sell the electricity to the grid that benefits from the electricity and anyone around them. He said that once it goes on the grid, it goes to wherever there is a shortfall and any utility can purchase it that is on that grid. He read an excerpt from the article to the board, "At the same time we think that it is important to be upfront about the downsides and the essential pitfalls of any technology. The only way to avoid problems is to acknowledge the plan for it and as our industry grows that is exactly what we must do. We have spoken to thousands of individuals about community solar". Mr. Bistany said that this is a different kind of project than they are proposing. Mr. Bistany went on to read from the article, "Many have expressed concerns that solar installations would take useful land out of commission and cause harm to the environment." Mr. Bistany said that they point to solar farms that are planned on active farmland, nature reserves, or land that is home to sensitive ecosystems. Mr. Bistany said that they are not wrong and it is not environmentally friendly to clear-cut forests for solar panel farms. He said that there are suitable farms such as Capped landfills, SuperFund sites, and said that there are plenty of sites in Georgia or land that cannot be used. He said that these solar projects make use of unusable land and provide much-needed revenue for municipalities and other stakeholders. Mr. Bistany read a line from an article called Technology and Innovative Review, "Solar photovoltaic parts are generally built on Brownfield sites. He said that a Brownfield site is what they previously explained in Community Solar, unusable land, Capped landfills, and SuperFund sites. Mr. Bistany said that there are plenty of other places, you just have to look for them. He said that you do not take good agricultural land and do this to it because it will never be used again for anything else. Mr. Bistany said that it is "death by solar". Mr. Bistany said that this is not a suitable site. He said that when you buy a property and you commit to building a home on it, and you commit to staying there, you understand the zoning and what is already there and what is around it. Mr. Bistany asked why would you take a project like this and put it down in the middle of what these people have worked for all their lives. He said that there are people such as Michael Wilson, who want to take his grandkids out in the woods and teach him about the woods and teach him how to hunt as his grandfather did for him. Mr. Bistany said that it is important that they maintain those kinds of things. He said that once they put a chain-link fence around the property, which they conveniently left out of the picture when they showed the trees blocking the solar panels, you are going to

change the pattern of all of the habitat. Mr. Bistany said that everything will change; anything migratory and anything on the ground. He said that he would lean on what the Board of Appeals did because they plainly heard what the people were saying. Mr. Bistany said that it is not the right place for this type of project and said that there are plenty of other places that they could put it where it will not impact the people around them. Mr. Bistany asked the board to think about it and said that they could make the ultimate decision.

Dennis Zabala addressed the board and said that he was the principal advisor to one of the largest companies of engineering in the United States. He said that they have been in business for over 130 years and he has been a member of the company for the last four years in a capacity where he is advising the facility in Puerto Rico. He said that before this he spent 35 years with Southern Company and 19 of those years, he was in the nuclear generation business in Georgia. Mr. Zabala said that for the last ten years before his retirement, he was an executive with Southern Power. He said that Southern Power is part of the company that is basically the competitive part of the business. He said that he invested in his team to deploy 3000 megawatts of solar generation in the States of Georgia, California, Nevada, and Texas. He said that they deployed 100 megawatts of biomass and 2000 megawatts of regeneration and over 2000 megawatts of gas combined cycle energy.

Mr. Zabala addressed the issues that were brought up at the meeting based on his experience as a developer, a constructor, and an operator in solar facilities throughout the United States and in Puerto Rico. He said that the first issue was lightning. He said during his ten years of constructing, building, and operating solar facilities they have not experienced any excessive amount of lightning in any of their other projects throughout the companies. He said that this includes biomass nuclear, gas, and wind turbines.

Mr. Zabala addressed the second issue which is tornados. He said that the solar panels are designed to withstand winds in excess of over 80 miles an hour and in some of the facilities in Costa Rico they have designed the solar panels to withstand winds in excess of over 130 miles an hour. Mr. Zabala said that the reason that they do this is because they have to comply with insurance regulations. He said that no one will provide insurance if you do not design them to withstand a certain amount of wind generation. Mr. Zabala said that there will be tornados and they are designed for a level five tornado because you have to be realistic and they are built to withstand that amount of wind. He said that they are designed better than the building that they are standing in.

Mr. Zabala addressed the issue of cleanliness. He said that when they design the solar panels, they assume a certain amount of soiling effect and they take into consideration the potential for dust, snow, and any other type of debris. Mr. Zabala said that there is no way they can clean 83,000 solar panels every day so they try to mitigate the amount of cleaning that is required on these solar panels

by assuming a certain amount of efficiency on the effectiveness of the panels themselves. Mr. Zabala said that they assume a one to two percent of loss ratio on the solar panels during the design because of the soiling effect.

Mr. Zabala addressed the issue with birds being killed. He said that they are confusing the concentrated solar panel facility. He said that a concentrated solar facility is a facility where you have mirrors. He said that the proposed solar panel farm is a photovoltaics facility where you have mirrors and you take the sunlight and reflect it back into a central location, a molten salt amount of water that heats up the water which makes the steam and you use the steam to rotate a turbine that generates electricity. He said that one of the concentrated solar facilities is the Ivanpah Solar Panel facility and it is located in California and another one is located in the Mojave Desert.

Mr. Zabala said that there are no moving parts in the design of a portable solar panel facility. He said that the only thing that will move is the tracking system and if you blink you will miss it because the tracking mechanism moves one degree, at the most, to track the sun when it is moving to be able to optimize the radiance in its path. Mr. Zabala said that there are no moving parts in the solar panel.

Mr. Zabala addressed the water issue. He said that when you are building the facilities in the desert, in California, Nevada, and Texas nothing grows underneath it. He said that when it rains you will see the water. He said that in Georgia, you are going to have grass. Mr. Zabala said that he lives in Alabama and on the way over here he passed at least five solar panel facilities. He said that they have built over 1000 solar panel facilities in Georgia and they have to hire people to come in and cut the grass because the grass will grow underneath the solar panels like it or not.

Mr. Zabala addressed the issue with light at night. He said that there are no lights and once the sun goes down the solar panel facility shuts down. He said that there is no movement or anything until the next morning when the sun starts shining again.

Mr. Zabala addressed the issue with benefits. He said that they have talked about clean energy. He said that one of the things that they are proud of in the Southeastern part of the United States is that they have a very competitive business with electricity. Mr. Zabala said that this is one of the reasons why the economy is as strong as it is today. He said that the average price of electricity in the Southeastern part of the United States is between 11 to 12 cents per kilowatt-hour. He said that when you are building a natural combined-cycle gas facility, that is one of the most efficient facilities that you can build. He said because that facility generates natural gas, it is between six to seven cents per kilowatt-hour. Mr. Zabala said that because something happened in Texas yesterday, the price of natural gas went up by four percent and this is a huge situation. He said that the price of electricity in Texas yesterday was a 3,000 percent increase because they

were running out of gas. Mr. Zabala said that people want solar power facilities because you can operate a solar facility for less than five-cents per kilowatt-hour. He said that the reason why everyone wants solar power generation, all the way to Puerto Rico and they want to be 100 percent renewable by the year 2050, is because when you are generating electricity, at five cents per kilowatt-hour. Mr. Zabala said that you will increase the economy and increase jobs and you will become competitive and that is what you want for the benefit of anyone.

Howard Duran of 356 Ridgeway Road addressed the board and said that he and his wife bought his property about four years ago to supplement their income. Mr. Duran said that right now it is a rental property, and when they sell it, they will be looking across the back porch and they will see the solar panels. He said that their property value will not be what they had hoped it would be and that he would not buy property facing the solar panel farm. Mr. Duran said that he votes no.

Maureen Duran of 356 Ridgeway addressed the board and said that she reads two local papers. Mrs. Duran said that there is a reason why they are called Industrial Parks and there is a reason that they have residential zoning. She said that she feels like it is the board's job to protect the residents of Lamar County. Mrs. Duran said that this is not in their favor.

Brittney Fisher Holloway of 450 Crawley Road addressed the board. Mrs. Holloway said that she had sent the board a letter on this matter. She said that all of the board members had heard how she feels and did not want to go over it again and said that if they had not read the e-mail, she would go over it again. Mrs. Holloway said that she submitted the letter in strong opposition to the special exception request on Crawley Road, Tax Map 017, Parcels 22 and 42 to be converted from Agricultural and Residential usage. She said that she understands that it is a person and a business's right as the owner of a property to apply for a special exception for their property. She said that while it is evident that these parcels of lands are appealing to the developer, she really wishes that they would not do this without regard for the health, safety, and sanctity, of this community. Mrs. Holloway said that she hopes Lamar County would not consider a variance of this type given the totality of the circumstance. She said that not only is such an outlier from the ambiance of our community but it also imposes a negative impact both known and unknown. Mrs. Holloway said that their community would be sacrificed without a good cause if the special exception is approved. She said that she has heard no argument in favor of this proposal that even remotely swayed her belief that this is a poor choice for their community. She said that the literature provided in connection to the letter sent out to the residents is one-sided and biased clearly ignoring the downside to this proposal as it relates to their unique circumstances. Mrs. Holloway said that there was little to no information in regard as to how it would affect the surrounding properties and families. She said that her opposition was grounded in a number of concerns each of which she said that she would examine in turn which includes negative environmental impact and local climate changes resulting from solar farms. Mrs. Holloway said that there is

detrimental impact that this variance will have on her property value and to their small community by including the property of this type. She said that she is raising a young daughter in the community and living in close proximity to the potentially dangerous and financially harmful eyesore and said that this was not a part of the future that she had envisioned for her. Mrs. Holloway said that in order to show the proximity of her property to the proposed variance she said that she attached a plan to her letter as Exhibit A. Mrs. Holloway said that her property is highlighted in blue and her neighbors, the Messer's and Ms. Wisener, are in purple and are designated by red arrows and their small dirt road is in orange. She said that the proposed solar panel farm is highlighted in yellow. Mrs. Holloway said that there is one road leading to her home and her neighbors. She said that there is one method of ingress and egress which means that she will pass by this eyesore every day not only to be exposed to its potentially harmful emission but also to have it disrupt the peaceful country lifestyle that her family and all of her neighbors have expected and enjoyed.

Mrs. Holloway said that she did care because this change will impact her in a number of ways. She said that environmental and climate changes are one of her predominant concerns to this proposal including the land degradation and wildlife habit loss as a result of the solar panel farm. Mrs. Holloway said previously the land could only be farmed as an agricultural-residential. She said that some people think that solar panel farms are low impact and for all she knows it could be low impact, but they live on a dirt road and they will never have the opportunity to have it paved and especially with a solar panel farm. Mrs. Holloway said that if they get a neighborhood then that also increases the taxes received and they could potentially get a paved road and said that these are the things that the board needs to consider as well.

Mrs. Holloway said that the farmland in their area, in her opinion, is precious and is gradually being sold away for commercial and corporate usage. She said that there will be none left and the solar panels will take resources from the land until it is depleted and no longer useable at the end of the solar panel life cycle. Mrs. Holloway said that while it is often stated that solar energy production is carbon-free, there are global warming emissions associated with particular stages of the solar panel life cycle. She said that this includes manufacturing, materials, transportation, installation, maintenance, decommissioning, and dismantling. Mrs. Holloway said that studies have shown that there is environmental impact associated with toxic chemicals escaping from solar panels as they age and as they are removed, damaged, or replaced due to natural events. Mrs. Holloway said that if a panel is aged or damaged, rainwater can wash chemicals such as cadmium and other things into the soil by implication into their well water sources. Mrs. Holloway said that according to the experts, this is considered hazardous waste. She asked why they were not concerned about hazardous waste being introduced into their community and their water supply. Mrs. Holloway asked if they had analyzed or questioned what type of chemicals are contained in the solar panels. Mrs. Holloway said that they know that there is potentially one

percent of metal. Mrs. Holloway said that cadmium is a great concern of hers because if they look at the land there is a natural spring that runs through it and it also runs onto her property, her neighbor's property, into Eady Creek, and into the City Pond. Mrs. Holloway said that City Pond feeds all of the residents of Lamar County, if you are on County water.

Mrs. Holloway said that additionally solar panel farms are known to raise temperatures which by nature they are attracting the sun to produce natural energy. She said that the placement of the solar panels does not allow the soil to cool therefore it raises the overall temperature. She said that the impact has been well studied in the surrounding properties and particularly those with farm uses which cannot sustain an increase in temperature for their crops.

Mrs. Holloway said that the reduction of property value is another detrimental impact on their community. She said that the introduction of solar panel farms will greatly reduce her property value regardless of what they say about Pike County. She said that people want to move to Pike County because they are known for their school system and she hopes that Lamar County will be known for this too. Mrs. Holloway said that for this reason the property values in Pike County are high and everyone wants to buy property there because of that.

Mrs. Holloway said that in speaking to the neighbors in her community, it is well known that looking at a solar panel farm day in and day out is not a desirable front or back yard view. She said that passing by it on a daily basis, on one's daily commute, is not attractive. Mrs. Holloway said that if the special exception is approved the community will be at risk of being bought out by the developers seeking to purchase large plots of farmland for commercial purposes. She said that it is known that special exceptions are passed routinely for those that have enough cash to hire architects or other professionals to draw impressive-looking plans to disseminate it if the board was to propose it. Mrs. Holloway said that setting precedence is dangerous because it can disturb the very fiber of their community. She said that this is a very small and humble community where farmland is a precious resource. Mrs. Holloway said that the zoning ordinances are written to preserve the character of the community. She said that a change in the community will make it a place where she will no longer bring her family. Mrs. Holloway said that this is a place that she calls home and she has built a life and a business here. She said that there has not been enough data collected to make an educated decision as to how this change will impact their community.

Mrs. Holloway said from an environmental, health and wellness and economic perspective, the number of taxpayers that are opposed to this special exception speaks volumes but to her knowledge has not been explored. She said that they are not a group of uneducated fools who are opposed to change or opposed to this special exception but they dislike the idea of change itself and oppose positive progress rather they are a group of educated citizens who have researched the solar panel farms and have consulted with professionals to understand the impact

of this change. Mrs. Holloway said that they are not going away and they are preparing to continue to oppose the special exception even if it is approved. She said that they only want to make certain that their family's health, home, and investment are being taken into consideration.

Mrs. Holloway said that she has also addressed proposed mitigation in the event that they do approve the special exception. Mrs. Holloway said that her husband was not there and said that he also signed the letter.

III. Minor Subdivision App. # 2021-01 by Richard and Geri Lewis

IV. Rezoning App # 2021-02 by Richard and Geri Lewis

Planning and Community Development Director Buice stated that there are a rezoning application and a minor subdivision application for tax map 020022016. She said that Mr. and Mrs. Lewis purchased 5.225 acres on 378 Five Points Road in the year 2018 and built their home. She said that the property is a part of a subdivision named the Pecan Orchard and was divided in the year 2018. Planning and Community Development Director Buice said that there are 20 lots in this original subdivision and it did not have to have board approval because all of the lots were five acres or more. She said that the owner would like to split the parcel to sell the other half to his grandson so that he can build his home. Planning and Community Development Director Buice said that in order to do this he is applying to change the zoning to R-2, currently, it's zoned A-R, to accommodate a lot that is less than five acres. She said that since the 5.225 acre lots were a part of a platted subdivision a split of this nature requires board approval. Planning and Community Development Director Buice said that a preliminary soil study has been done and it shows an area that will hold a conventional septic system. Planning and Community Development Director Buice said that there may be a drainage issue and the Public Works Director is here to speak on that issue. Planning and Community Development Director Buice said that she did a study on Qpublic and found that within a quarter mile of this property, three other properties are under five acres, and if you expand that out into a half-mile, it goes out to about 13 properties.

Richard Lewis of 378 Five Points Road, Milner, Georgia addressed the board. He said that he would like to divide 5.225 acres and subdivide that and deed 2.2 acres of land to his grandson so that he can build a very small home.

IV. Adjournment

Chairman Glass called for a motion to adjourn the Public Hearing. Commissioner Heiney made a motion to adjourn the Public Hearing at approximately 7:32 p.m. Vice-Chairman Traylor seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

THE LAMAR COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Charles Glass, Chairman

Bennie Horton, Vice-Chairman

Robert Heiney, Commissioner

Ryran Traylor, Commissioner

Nancy Thrash, Commissioner

Attest: _____
Carlette Davidson, County Clerk