

**Renewable Energy Development and Siting Task Force**  
**June 12, 2020**  
**2:00 p.m.**

**Minutes**

- Welcome
  - Welcome and attendance taken by Chair Greg Snook at 2:00 p.m.
- From the Chair
  - Snook reminded participants on the call to mute their phones unless they wish to speak in order to avoid background noise.
  - Snook introduced Andrew Cassilly to give a legislative update.
- Cassilly gave an update on SB281, which passed the house and the senate during the 2020 legislative session. The legislation promotes three major concepts: it removes the fee for the voluntary cleanup program (VCP), promotes clarity of the existing authority of the Public Service Commission (PSC) to evaluate substantive changes to an energy project, and eliminates the franchise tax for public-private partnerships that are willing to site energy projects on a preferred location.
- The passage of the bill resulted in two of the three goals being accomplished.
  - Two changes to the legislation included removing the language clarifying the authority of the PSC to evaluate material changes and adding the SuperFund Enterprise Management System under eligible property sites.
  - Janet Christensen Lewis, Maryland Farm Bureau (MFB) representative asked if Cassilly can go over the change that was made regarding the PSC.
    - Cassilly explained that the original bill would have clarified the existing authority of the PSC to evaluate substantive changes to an energy project. The PSC currently has the authority to re-evaluate a project in the event of substantial change. This clarifying language was removed from the bill on the senate side.
  - John Finnerty, solar energy industry representative asked if there's a time period where energy projects could qualify for exemption of fees under the VCP if it was already paid for before the legislation passed.
    - Secretary Ben Grumbles of the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) followed up after the call and provided the following information:
      - The law containing the waiver goes into effect Oct. 1.
      - The waiver applies to the VCP application fee, so it would apply to prospective clean and renewable energy projects on sites applying for the program. It would not affect sites that already applied, paid the application fee, and are currently in the VCP.
- Presentation by Joel Dunn and Susan Minnemeyer, Chesapeake Conservancy
  - Key takeaways
    - Dunn discussed the Conservation Innovation Center's recent draft report draft on solar siting methodology for state and local governments and the pilot that was included on Baltimore County and City. The report was prepared for the Valleys Planning Council, who partnered with the Chesapeake Conservancy to produce their report.

- Dunn noted it's important to try and meet solar energy goals without losing prime farmland or clearing forests.
  - They have been researching what makes a site optimal, and used geographic information system (GIS) analyses and high resolution land cover data.
  - Susan Minnemeyer, who helped lead the project for CIC, is the vice president of technology at the Chesapeake Conservancy.
  - The goal of the project is to identify optimal sites for solar energy, recognizing that solar energy development is critical to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and mitigate climate change.
  - Equity is an important consideration when identifying if solar energy can benefit all residents.
  - The pilot study focused on Baltimore County and City. They looked at electricity consumption, land area, and population.
  - Minnemeyer explained they also focused on land use issues, like if the land could compete with other desirable land uses (prime farmland for food production).
  - Reclaiming degraded lands is a great opportunity to avoid competing land uses, as they are out of productive use.
  - In terms of equity, distributed generation and net metering can provide significant cost savings for electricity users. Solar energy development is an important source of employment.
  - Data from the Smart DG+ tool was used for a technical screening for sites.
  - She explained they identified optimal sites as already in the built environment (primarily rooftop and parking canopies), or sites on degraded lands (VCP sites, capped landfills, etc.). The optimal sites in the report were ones already on degraded land.
  - Minnemeyer noted they identified just under 14,000 acres are needed of total optimal or preferred sites in Baltimore County and City.
  - Minnemeyer explained the results, which are outlined in the presentation document.
  - Recommendations from the study include:
    - Prioritize optimal sites.
    - Incentivize ground mounted solar on preferred sites.
      - New Jersey's community solar pilot program approach was reviewed, which ranked applications based on a list of criteria.
  - The solar siting map viewer is available now in draft form for use.
- Snook opened the call up to questions and comments from task force members.
    - Snook asked how long it took for them to put the research and analysis together.
      - Minnemeyer said they developed the method and analysis over a 7-month period, but repeating and applying the analysis in other regions of the state would be much simpler now that the testing and research has been done.
        - She noted incorporating the analysis by parcel with the SmartDG+ tool could be a potential next step.
    - Director Mary Beth Tung, Maryland Energy Administration (MEA) noted she would like to set up a meeting with MEA and the Chesapeake Conservancy to discuss the analysis.

- Director Tung said that some of the recommendations from the task force's draft may need to be modified a bit due COVID-19 affecting the industry. She explained environmental justice (EJ) issues will need to be addressed, and that wind, both land-based and offshore should be addressed.
  - Minnemeyer said that there is an EJ screening project through the Chesapeake Bay Program with valuable data.
  - Secretary Grumbles applauded Minnemeyer and Dunn on the work they helped complete with the Valleys Planning Council around mapping and planning.
  - Lewis said she hopes this resource becomes available for other regions.
  - Jason Dubow, Maryland Department of Planning (MDP) said it would be good to get thoughts from the solar industry about the level of incentive necessary to move these projects to optimal areas.
    - Finnerty said he's happy to engage the industry, and provide recommendations surrounding community solar programs, environmental justice issues, and commercial property owners.
  - Helen Stewart, power plant research program (PPRP) noted that one of the things that's driving where solar development happens is transmission and distribution capacity.
  - Minnemeyer said in terms of readiness of sites, data may vary county to county. In terms of pulling data on the age of a building, that is a significant factor. In the District of Columbia, there is a leed certification requirement for large new projects, which is driving development on new buildings.
- Snook opened the call up to questions and comments from the public.
  - Dru Schmidt-Perkins said regarding equity issues, some people are not receiving the benefit. Community solar is helpful, but it's a small reduction, especially on a roof in a low income area.
  - An interested stakeholder asked if the Chesapeake Conservancy has taken comments on the report. He noted the renewable portfolio standard numbers seem off and would like to provide feedback.
    - Minnemeyer encouraged him to email her any feedback. She noted there are still final edits in process.
  - David Murray, MDV-SEIA emphasized that when discussing equity and community solar, cost is important. The cost of providing the benefits of solar, especially community solar, is much lower on ground mounted versus rooftop. He asked if the report factored in the average installation costs in different areas.
    - Minnemeyer said they explained it in the report, but welcomes more feedback and recommendations of specifics. She recognized that ground mounted is less expensive, which is why they also include preferred ground mounted sites.
  - Murray asked if there is an estimate on what percentage of agricultural land in Baltimore County is prime soil or designated prime farmland.
    - Minnemeyer said they don't have a number in the report, but the data covers the entire county, so they could provide that.
  - Teresa Moore with Valleys Planning Council addressed the comment Dru made regarding making solar more affordable for low to moderate income (LMI) people, and that New Jersey's projects during the first year of the program benefited LMI people.



- Interested Stakeholders
- James McKittrick, Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
- Janet Christensen-Lewis, MFB representative
- Jason Dubow, MDP
- Joey Chen, PSC
- John Finnerty, Solar energy industry representative
- Landon Farhig, MEA
- Nimisha Sharma, MDOT
- Mary Beth Tung, MEA
- Matthew Sherring, MES
- Ryan Opsal, MEA
- Shawn Seaman, PPRP, DNR
- Stephen Schatz, Governor's Office
- Wade Haerle, Commerce