

PROPERTY OWNER:

Allen E. Boccock Jr. and Linda S. Boccock
Dennis Lee Bradley Sr. & Etal Trustee

APPLICANT:

Round Hill Solar, LLC

LOCATION OF PROPERTY:

North and south of Guthrie Road, east of White Hill Road, and northwest of Tinkling Spring Road in the Riverheads District

SIZE OF PROPERTY:

Approximately 880 acres

SIZE OF SITE UNDER PANEL:

Approx. 560 acres

VICINITY ZONING: General Agriculture zoning and Public Use Overlay (landfill) to the north, General Agriculture zoning to the east, south and west, General Industrial zoning to the south.

PREVIOUS ZONING OR S.U.P.: Currently zoned General Agriculture

LAND USE MAPS: Property between White Hill Road and Churchmans Mill Road is in a Community Development Area of the Comprehensive Plan and designated for future low density residential land use. The other property comprising the project is in an Agriculture Conservation Area of the Comprehensive Plan, except for a small portion of TMP 075-8, directly north of Tinkling Spring Road, which is also in a Community Development Area designated for future low density residential development.

TRAFFIC DATA:

White Hill Road: 6,600 ADT (from Churchmans Mill Road to Route 340)

Guthrie Road: 130 ADT (from White Hill Road to 1.75 miles North of Churchmans Mill Road and 140 ADT (from 1.75 miles North of Churchmans Mill Road to Tinkling Springs Road

Tinkling Springs Road: 6,800 ADT (from Route 340 to 0.8 miles North of Route 340) and 6,600 ADT (from 0.8 miles North of Route 340 to Christians Creek Road

VDOT COMMENTS:

VDOT Site Specific Comments:

The largest traffic impact is expected to be during construction of the new solar fields. Temporary Construction Entrances will be permitted only in areas approved by VDOT (sight distance and adjacent roadway conditions will be considered). Entrance size will depend on the size of the design vehicles used in construction. Drainage characteristics will be reviewed at site plan.

Once constructed, each temporary construction entrance will be removed or reconstructed as a permanent entrance, subject to VDOT approval. If serving 20 vehicle trips or less per day, the entrance will be classified as a private entrance. If serving 20 to 50 vehicle trips per day, the entrance will be considered a low volume commercial entrance, and must meet the requirements as such. If serving greater than 50 vehicle trips per day, the entrance may need to be paved and the classification will be selected at time of site plan. Additional comments are likely to be generated at site plan stage.

VDOT General Comments:

Should the safety, use, or maintenance level of any existing or proposed entrance to a VDOT maintained highway change in the future, VDOT reserves the right to require additional modifications as warranted by the site specific conditions.

If any work is required on VDOT right-of-way, a VDOT Land Use Permit is required. The permit is issued through the Harrisonburg Residency office.

HEALTH DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: It is advised that any drainfields for homes on the properties be located to assure solar panels are not placed over them. If you have any questions please let me know.

SCHOOL BOARD STAFF COMMENTS: The request for a solar project on Guthrie Road (SR652) will have no significant impact on these three (3) schools.

The table below indicates the enrollment as of July 8, 2020

School	Enrollment	Capacity
Stuarts Draft Elem SDES	578	834
Stuarts Draft Middle SDMS	517	960
Stuart Draft High SDHS	731	940

FIRE-RESCUE COMMENTS: Fire-Rescue sees little to no impact on service delivery from this request.

SERVICE AUTHORITY'S COMMENTS:

1. Water and sewer capacities are not reserved until system adequacy is determined (supply, treatment, transmission) and payment of the connection fees has been received in accordance with Service Authority Policy. Augusta County Service Authority Policies and Procedures can be found at <http://www.acsawater.com/oppm>.

2. Any engineering evaluations and upgrades or extensions would be the responsibility of the owner/developer and are subject to Service Authority review and approval.
3. Investigation of available fire flow is recommended to ensure that the system is capable of providing the needed fire flow to comply with Chapter 24 of the Augusta County Code requirements for the proposed use of the property. Any upgrades or extensions would be the responsibility of the owner/developer and are subject to Service Authority review and approval.
4. There is an existing 12" waterline along White Hill Road across from Tax Map #s 74-139Y and 75-9E. There is an existing 4" waterline running through the southern tip of Tax Map # 75-8 along Tinkling Spring Road.
5. There is no public sewer available in the area of the subject parcels.

Because these properties are primarily located outside of the Urban Service and Community Development Areas, the Service Authority has not included these properties in any long-term planning. If considered for approval, the Service Authority requests that adequate space be provided for access to the existing water main on TM 75-8. Replacement/relocation of this water main closer to Tinkling Spring Road may be appropriate at some point, which may require additional easement area.

The Service Authority also requests that adequate space be provided along White Hill Road, on TM 74-139Y and TM 75-9E, in the event that the existing waterline would need to be replaced on the opposite side of the road.

ENGINEERING COMMENTS:

Environment Ordinance Considerations

Stormwater management must be addressed per the provisions of the Augusta County Stormwater Ordinance. The county will consider all areas under panel to be impervious, though we will consider site specific calculations demonstrating some level of infiltration and/or treatment of runoff in the area underneath of the panels and surrounding areas.

The applicant is advised to contact the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality for any requirements related to proposed work in wetland areas or adjacent to any streams.

This property drains to Christians Creek which is listed on the Virginia DEQ 2018 and DRAFT 2020 Impaired Waters List. This impaired segment extends from its headwaters downstream to its confluence with Folly Mills Creek. The impaired uses are recreation and aquatic life, the specific impairments are E. coli, fecal coliform and violations of the general benthics standard. The sources are municipal (Urbanized High Density Area), non-point sources and wildlife other than waterfowl. TMDLs are approved for the bacterial and benthic impairments and must be considered by the applicant. This segment is included in the EPA approved Christians Creek benthic TMDL (Federal

TMDL ID # 24514) and the EPA approved Christians Creek bacteria TMDL (Federal TMDL ID # 9480).

Additionally, the Augusta County Comprehensive Plan lists the Christians Creek – Folly Mills Creek watershed as a Priority Watershed for Groundwater Protection due to the presence of karst features and the location of Source Water Assessment Program zones.

Overlay Ordinance Considerations

This property lies outside of the Source Water Protection Overlay (SWPO), Airport Overlay District (APO), and Urban Service Overlay Districts (USO).

Portions of this property lie within Zone AE on the FEMA FIRM. Any development on this portion of the property must meet the provisions of the Floodplain Overlay (FPO) Ordinance. Placement of fill in this area is discouraged. Any fill placed in this area could impact other properties and will require a detailed flood study and a Letter of Map Revision (LOMR) from FEMA. New lots must contain a “Buildable Area” outside of the floodplain.

Subdivision Ordinance Considerations

§21-9.1 Subsection B of the County Subdivision Ordinance addresses street layout and access to adjacent property. Development is required to connect to existing or planned streets and must also provide for access to adjacent property that is located with areas designated in the Comprehensive Plan as Urban Service or Community Development Areas. As the majority of the proposed project lies within the Agricultural Conservation Area (ACA) and Guthrie Rd will remain a thru route, there is no connectivity impact. The area west of Churchman’s Mill Road, however it is developed, should be developed with internal connectivity and consolidated entrance(s).

Natural Resources Recommendations from the Comprehensive Plan

The majority of the project is located within the ACA. The Augusta County Comprehensive Plan recommends performance standards to protect natural resources. For Agricultural Conservation Areas, a riparian buffer of 100 feet on either side of a stream or the limit of the floodplain (wider of the two) is encouraged, and stormwater should not be piped through in a manner to short-cut the buffer. Additionally, there should be no development or filling in floodplain areas and reforestation is encouraged.

Portions of the site may contain slopes in excess of 25%. In Agricultural Conservation Areas, the Comprehensive Plan recommends no grading, roads or building sites on slopes >25% and ridgelines.

Wetlands may or may not exist on the site. For Wetland areas, the Comprehensive Plan recommends provision of a 100 foot buffer from the edge of wetlands and enhanced water quality treatment for any water discharging to the wetlands.

For unique natural features such as caves, major karst features, critical habitats, etc., the Comprehensive Plan recommends provision of open space amenities through development of layout and lot sizes, as well as maximizing continued use of active agricultural and forestry areas.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN CONSIDERATIONS –

Objective C: Encourage distributed solar and carefully sited utility scale solar as a means of achieving renewable energy goals.

Policy 1: Economy. Recognize the employment opportunities, especially for distributed solar, and economic diversification opportunities that utility scale solar provide.

Staff Analysis: See completed Mangum Economics study entitled “Round Hill Solar Economic and Fiscal Contribution to Augusta County, Virginia,” dated July 6, 2020

Policy 2: Rural viewsheds. Desire to maintain rural viewsheds and agriculture as a predominant component of our economy, but sees synergy among agricultural and rural land development and utility scale solar development so long as the clustering, size, or fragmentation of such facilities does not have undue adverse impact on the surrounding neighborhoods.

Staff Analysis: General Agriculture zoning surrounds the project, with a General Industrial zoned property at the southern end of the project. The character of the area is representative of agriculture operations and low-density residential development amongst mostly agriculture fields. While there is some sparse, residential development adjacent to the project, it is not consistent with the development pattern of a traditional, subdivision neighborhood. The project is contiguous and does not fragment existing developed areas. The portion of the project between Churchmans Mill Road and Guthrie Road has a greater impact on rural viewsheds from public roadways than other portions of the project. The portion of the project along Tinkling Spring Road is setback over 700' from the roadway. Guthrie Road would also be visually impacted, although the ADT is under 150 trips as compared to over 6,500 for Tinkling Spring Road and White Hill Road.

Policy 3: Agricultural landscape and economy. Siting of projects should evaluate the agricultural landscape of the project area and surrounding area to assess the effects of a project on the agricultural economy.

Staff Analysis: The majority of the project acreage is in cropland agriculture. There are silos and other farm structures on the properties north and south of Guthrie Road that would be removed to construct the solar project.

Based on land use taxation applications the land involved in this project produced cattle on 310 acres, soybeans on 315 acres, corn on 242 acres, alfalfa on 15 acres, and hay on 37 acres. This project includes approximately 560 acres of PV panels on a total 880 acre site. The development of a solar project at this location would lead to the loss of the aforementioned agricultural production for the next 35 years.

Policy 4: Prime farmland and Agricultural and Forestal Districts. Siting of projects in Agricultural and Rural Planning Policy Areas should consider the presence of prime farmland producing soils and/or adjacent Agricultural and Forestal Districts.

Tax Map	Total Acreage	Non-Qualifying	Class 1	Class 2	Class 3	Class 4-7	Forest
75-2D	9.02	0	0	7	1	1.02	0
75-4A	236.525	1	0	44	103	64.525	24
75-4E	3.24	0	0	0	2	1.24	0
74-139Y	38.008	0	0	10	22.008	4.5	1.5
74-139Y1	29.523	0	0	12	17.523	0	0
75-4C	3.1	0	0	0	1.5	1	0.6
75-5	251.134	1	0	67	89.134	94	0
75-5B	1.893	0	0	1.893	0	0	0
75-6	95.241	0	0	22	61.241	12	0
75-9E	12.556	0	0	6	6.556	0	0
75-8	207.982	1	0	68	95	43.982	0
Totals	888.222	3	0	237.89	398.96	222.27	26.1

Staff Analysis: According to the above chart, there are approximately 885 acres that qualify for land use taxation out of the approximately 888 acres. Class 1, 2, and 3 soils are considered the best for farming purposes in the County based on soil data. Approximately 637 acres of those qualifying acres are within Class 2 or 3, which is approximately 72%. None of the acreage, qualifying for land use taxation, has Class 1 soils, which are the best for farming purposes. Approximately 25% of the acreage is within Classes 4-7 and a little under 3% is classified as forest. This project would have some impact on prime agricultural soils over the lifetime of the project.

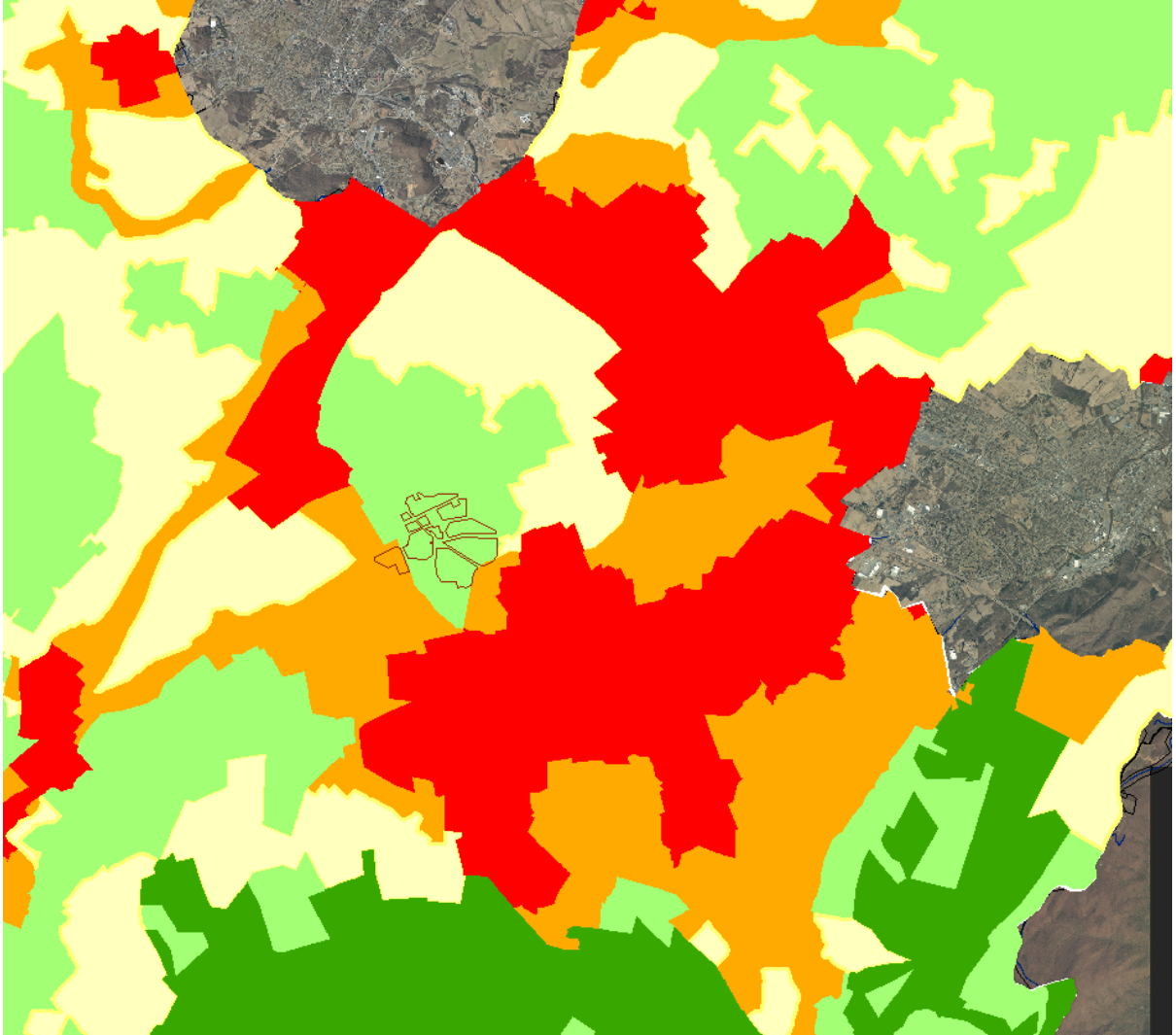
There are no adjacent Agricultural and Forestal districts near the project.

Policy 5: Visual impact. Siting of projects should take into consideration surrounding neighborhood developments and how visual impacts to those neighborhoods can be mitigated through appropriate buffers. Siting and design of projects should strive to utilize existing vegetation and buffers that exist naturally when adjacent to public rights of way or other adjacent property.

Staff Analysis: After an on-site review of the project boundaries, staff recognizes visual impacts to some surrounding residences including: the dwellings on the west side of White Hill Road, the church and dwelling to the north of Guthrie Road, and existing dwellings and building lots (one currently being built on) along Brenneman Lane. There is another house and farm located east of Churchmans Mill Road that would be visually impacted at the rear of their property, but the front and side yards are heavily wooded. The most robust buffer proposed is along White Hill Road and there is some existing vegetation along White Hill Road, but due to the topography and location of the residences west of White Hill Road, the existing vegetation and planted buffer will not fully address the visual impacts. The properties along Brenneman Lane, north of Guthrie Road, and east of Churchmans Mill Road will also be visually impacted.

Policy 6: Balanced land uses. Desire to balance the utility scale solar land use with other important and valuable land uses for our citizens. The size/extent of projects should be considered in proximity to other developed land uses so as not to have undue adverse impacts on the existence of nearby developed residential, commercial or mixed use communities. Consideration of existing Augusta County Service Authority infrastructure be made.

Staff Analysis: With a county as large as Augusta County, an evaluation of a balance of land uses could be considered from a countywide perspective as well as an immediate community perspective. With no other currently approved utility scale solar projects in Augusta County, the former does not relate to this specific staff analysis. From a nearby community perspective, the majority of surrounding land is agricultural. The Stuarts Draft development area to the south, as designated in the Comprehensive Plan, is a little under 13,000 acres for either Urban Service Area or Community Development Area development patterns, ranging from more dense residential, business, and industrial development to low density residential development. Much of this acreage is still undeveloped. This project also sits to the southeast of the development areas South of Staunton to Greenville and southwest of the development area of Fishersville. While 880 acres is a significant size for a single land use, the Agricultural Conservation Area part of this project and in the middle of the three development areas described above represents 4,225 acres and the Rural Conservation Area within that same location represents 3,199 acres (See map below).



Policy 7: Compact, interconnected development. Projects within Urban Service and Community Development Areas should not detract from the compact, interconnected, pedestrian-oriented development pattern.

Staff Analysis: The project is located almost entirely within an Agricultural Conservation Area of the Comprehensive Plan. However, there is a portion of the project that is within a Community Development area of the Comprehensive Plan due to existence of public water, along White Hill Road and to the south near Tinkling Spring Road. The area east and west of Churchmans Mill Road has low density residential lot divisions and development to the south and across White Hill Road. Staff feels that the majority of the project does not detract from the compact, interconnected, pedestrian-oriented development pattern because the project is sited mostly outside of the Planning Policy Areas, which envision such development. With the exception of the area between Churchmans Mill Road and White Hill Road.

Policy 8: Open space. Support projects that seek to actively create opportunities and partnerships that provide for natural open spaces and outdoor recreational activities such as pedestrian corridors, wildlife watching areas, and fishing areas, especially in publically accessible land and rights-of-ways.

Staff Analysis: The project as proposed does include open space and wildlife corridors through the avoidance of wetlands and associated breaks in the fenceline boundary.

Policy 9: Interconnectivity. For projects that are adjacent to public spaces or other planned developments, encourage projects that provide for trails and linkages to adjacent land planned for or already developed.

Staff Analysis: The majority of the project is not adjacent to land already significantly developed or planned for development, except for the portion in the Community Development Area. As noted in the Engineering Department comments above, the area west of Churchmans Mill Road, however it is developed, should be developed with internal connectivity and consolidated entrance(s) due to planned low density residential development, on existing public water, along White Hill Road. Interconnectivity and the consolidation of entrances within an area planned for development, provides for a safer and more efficient transportation pattern.

Policy 10: Resource considerations. Projects should be designed, sited, and constructed in a way that protects and preserves the County's natural, scenic, and cultural resources including:

- a. Streams, rivers, wetlands** – The project avoids locating panels and other equipment within wetland areas.
- b. Fertile soils** - The project would be locating on soils that have been determined as fertile through soils classification data.
- c. Habitats** – While habitat will likely be affected, staff is not aware of any sensitive or endangered species that would be particularly affected by this project.
- d. Native vegetation** – The project proposes to utilize the Virginia Department of Virginia Conservation and Recreation Pollinator Smart Certification Program, which includes a point system for the use of native and pollinator vegetation in buffer areas and underneath panels. This certification program is a best management practice through VDCR and provides for aesthetic and environmental benefits.
- e. Forests** – The project is not densely wooded and would not cause the loss of significant forestland.
- f. Historic and archaeological resources** - The project does not affect any known historic or archaeological resources on the property

or nearby. The Permit By Rule process through the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, does require more in depth studies and analysis regarding known historic or archaeological resources. There review and approval would be subsequent to approval at the local level.

Policy 11: Natural resource benefits. The County sees value in projects that create additional natural resource benefits through the use of native vegetation, the creation of wildlife corridors, and the use of pollinator species in buffer areas and underneath panels.

Proposed project conditions propose reaching a lifetime pollinator smart certification. Staff feels that such condition complies with the above policy.