

October 6, 2020

Montgomery County Council  
100 Maryland Avenue  
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear Montgomery County Council Members,

We, the undersigned, are writing to urge you to support Community Solar in Montgomery County. Specifically, we ask you to support Zoning Text Amendment (ZTA) 20-01, which will allow a limited amount of land in our Agricultural Reserve to be used for small solar projects that will provide shared solar power to our community.

Currently, solar serving multiple households is not permitted in the Ag Reserve, which is where almost all of the county's open space suitable for Community Solar is located. Maryland's legislatively mandated Community Solar program offers access to low-cost, locally generated solar power to the over half of state and county households who can't have solar on their own rooftop – apartment dwellers, condo owners, those whose roofs aren't suitable or have too much shade, those who simply can't afford it. The program specifically includes solar access for low- and moderate-income households, who so far have been essentially left out of solar development.

ZTA 20.01 would amend the zoning rules to allow for Community Solar development on less than 2 percent of Ag Reserve land. Presently, our zoning regulations mean that all ground-based Community Solar projects that could serve Montgomery County residents in either the Pepco or Potomac Edison service areas have been built in other counties. We have none. The size of individual Community Solar projects is limited to 2 megawatts (about 12-15 acres); in total, the small amount of land covered under the ZTA will allow enough solar to power about 50,000 households, almost 150,000 people.

The ZTA specifically incorporates all the county's regulations protecting trees and forests, wetlands, and other environmentally sensitive areas, as well as prohibiting the removal of topsoil, limiting use of concrete, and restricting development of solar on USDA prime (Class 1) soil. It also requires pollinator-friendly planting and co-location of other agricultural practices that have been proven to be compatible with solar and add value to farm productivity as well as carbon reduction. Analyses by the county itself and separately by the solar industry show that further restrictions - including restricting development on additional soil classes - will just be poison pills that will effectively make the needed solar development not feasible.

The Climate Crisis demands that we urgently move to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions driving climate disruption. Marylanders' use of electricity is one of our two top sources of greenhouse gas production (transportation is the other) and of other health-harming pollutants. Replacing fossil fuel-generated electricity with clean renewable sources - especially solar - is an essential action.

We support expansion of clean energy using a range of strategies, from offshore wind to Community Solar. Some people have asked why we can't just focus on rooftops. Putting solar on rooftops and parking lots is one part of the solution, but is not sufficient by itself to get us to our climate goals, and doesn't address access issues for those who don't own their homes. Community Solar is a critical tool for providing more equitable access to solar.

Our county has set necessary but ambitious goals for reducing the greenhouse gas pollution we produce. However, as a D.C. Councilmember recently said, *"A goal is only as good as what you're willing to do to achieve it."*

Just two weeks ago, the UN reported that the world now has a 25 percent (and increasing) chance of hitting the 1.5 degree Celsius end-of-century warming limit set in the Paris Accords in the next 5 years.

ZTA 20.01 is a significant and essential step toward helping the county meet its stated greenhouse gas reduction and clean energy goals. Please support this ZTA without any delay.

Sincerely,

Josh Tulkin, Director, Sierra Club, Maryland Chapter  
Shruti Bhatnagar, Chair, Sierra Club, Montgomery County Group  
Tom Matzzie, CEO, Clean Choice Energy  
Mike Tidwell, Executive Director, CCAN  
David Goodrich, Chair, Chesapeake Climate Action Network Board of Directors  
Rebecca St John, Director, Citizens Climate Lobby Gaithersburg/Germantown  
Joelle Nover, Director, Interfaith Power & Light (DC.MD.NoVA)  
Joyce Breiner, Exec. Director, Poolsville Green Inc.  
Jigar Shah, President, Generate Capital  
Corey Ramsden, VP, Go Solar Programs – Solar United Neighbors  
Gary Skulnik, CEO Neighborhood Sun Benefit Corp  
Julie Boddy, Takoma Park Nuclear Free Committee  
Aimee Schmidt, Silver Lining Institute  
Alfred Bartlet, Chesapeake Physicians for Social Responsibility, Board member