



**COUNTY OF AUGUSTA**  
COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA  
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
P.O. BOX 590  
COUNTY GOVERNMENT CENTER  
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**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Mr. Gerald Garber, Augusta County Board of Supervisors  
Augusta County Planning Commission  
Augusta County Board of Zoning Appeals

**FROM:** Kaitlyn Savage, Planner I  
Julia Hensley, Planner II

**CC:** Timothy Fitzgerald, County Administrator  
Doug Wolfe, Director of Community Development  
Jeff Lord, RWE Clean Energy  
Bryan Jack-Schoffman, RWE Clean Energy  
Stephen Quina, Mid-Atlantic Manager of Engineering, VHB  
Kevin Comer, Director of Technical Services, Stark Tech

**DATE:** September 10, 2024

**SUBJECT:** Executive Summary for Weyers Cave VAA, LLC

The Augusta County Planning Commission will conduct a public hearing at **7:00 p.m., Tuesday, October 8, 2024** to consider a request for a substantial accord determination pursuant to Virginia Code Section 15.2-2232 for the Weyers Cave VAA, LLC Special Use Permit request for **Weyers Cave A Solar**. This request is to construct and operate a small solar energy system (3 MWac, approximately **24 acres in the fenced project area**) on property owned by The Farm at Chapel Hill, LLC (TMP 020-24) located at 194 Chapel Hill Lane in Weyers Cave in the Middle River Magisterial District.

Please find below a summary of this request's adherence to the 12 policies addressing solar energy facilities in the Augusta County Comprehensive Plan. For more details regarding this request and its adherence to each policy, please review the staff report.

**PROS:**

- 1. Adherence to Policies 2 and 5: Rural viewsheds and Visual impact** – The applicant provided staff with updated site plans that show Alternative #2 Vegetative Buffers along the entire perimeter of the parcel.
- 2. Adherence to Policy 3: Agricultural landscape and economy** – The applicant states that the project will have minimal impact on the agricultural landscape, stating that the land can be easily restored to agricultural use following the decommissioning process.
- 3. Adherence to Policy 4: Prime farmland and Agricultural and Forestal districts** – The project will not significantly disturb prime farmland or farmland of statewide importance, nor will it significantly clear forested land. The project will encourage the continuation of agricultural use in and around the fenced project area.

4. **Adherence to Policy 6: Balanced land uses** – The project’s photovoltaic coverage will be less than 200 acres, is sited on a contiguous parcel, and is not in close proximity to existing solar facilities. The installation of a solar energy system would have no undue adverse impacts relevant to this policy.
5. **Adherence to Policy 11: Natural resource benefits** – The project proposes planting low-growing native pollinator species throughout the site to stabilize disturbed areas. The applicant states local native pollinators will have a positive impact on the surrounding natural resources.
6. **Adherence to Policy 12: Clustering and colocation** – The proposed project will be developed in a single construction phase on a privately-owned parcel. The project is not in close proximity to any other existing or pre-operational solar facilities.

#### **CONS:**

1. **Policy 1: Economy** – The applicant provided clarification on the discrepancy between the average demand for 50 workers on the construction of a 3MW solar project versus the 9 direct and indirect workers the project expects to employ. The applicant also provided an explanation for the calculation of the current property revenue value for the next 35 years.

As it relates to the number of full-time equivalent workers assumed for the duration of the project, the applicant and Mangum provided clarification on the economic contributions to Augusta County during an estimated one-time pulse of economic activity during the project’s construction phase.

Although the clarifications supported staff’s analysis of potential economic benefits to the County, staff does not find the economic and employment opportunities to be significant enough to adhere to Policy 1, despite the calculated values being greater than the values at its current and existing use.

#### **POLICIES NOT APPLICABLE TO THIS PROJECT:**

1. **Policy 7: Compact, interconnected development** – The proposed project is not located within an Urban Service Area or a Community Development Area. This policy is not applicable to this project.
2. **Policy 8: Open space** – Though the property does have frontage on the North River, the proposed project is not located along a pedestrian corridor, near any public land, or near areas that are common places for public fishing and wildlife observation activities. This policy is not applicable to this project.
3. **Policy 9: Interconnectivity** – This project is located on a privately-owned parcel. This policy is not applicable to this project.

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** Due to the project's adherence to Policies 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 11, and 12, with no applicability to Policies 7-9, staff finds the project **in substantial accord with the Comprehensive Plan.**

While staff finds the project in substantial accord with the Comprehensive Plan and sees improvements to the avoidance of impact to wetlands, there will be a direct encroachment on delineated wetlands. Due to this encroachment, staff recommends the applicant provide documentation that speaks to the USACE not requiring a permit for this particular impact.

If the Planning Commission finds this proposal to be in substantial accord with the Comprehensive Plan and the Board of Zoning Appeals desires to approve the project, **staff would recommend that approval be conditional on compliance with the pre-conditions and operating conditions presented in the staff report.**