

PROS AND CONS FROM WRITTEN PUBLIC COMMENT

Utility-Scale Solar Facilities – Highlights of public comments

In preparation for the April 4, 2022, Special Public Meeting of the Johnson County Board of County Commissions meeting on proposed Utility-Scale Solar Regulations, planning staff has prepared a summary memo of written public testimony gathered regarding the topic. Starting in September 2021, County Planning Staff has reviewed, disseminated, and published public comments to the community, Johnson County Planning Commission, and the Board of County Commissioners, and is currently available for review at the following website:

<https://www.jocogov.org/solar>

It is accurate to note that hundreds of comments have been received by the planning department, reflecting both support and opposition to the proposed regulations. In an attempt to summarize recurring themes found in those comments, planning staff has prepared a summary below.

SUPPORT

Land Use Attributes

- Low impact on land.
- No evidence of influences to property values.
- Land-owner rights.
- Long operating life span.
- Quiet operation.
- Low visual profile.
- Min of 2,000 acres.
- 25 – 30 CUP.
- Minimum of 40' setbacks. Less along unimproved roads.
- No arbitrary cap on the size of a facility
- Setback and buffer requirements should be similar to commercial uses without impediments.

Alternative/Renewable Energy Benefits

- Solar supports alternative, renewable energy efforts; however, it should be equitably distributed and available for all.
- Helps reduce the carbon footprint in Johnson County.
- Cost of renewable energy is less than fossil-fuel energy.
- Zero air emissions.

OPPOSITION

Land Use Concerns

- Some property owners could be surrounded by utility-scale solar on three sides of their property.
- Unsightly or ugly; visually unappealing.
- Destroys the rural character of unincorporated Johnson County.
- The original distance of one mile from a city is too close. Need to consider the city's planning area.
- Encourages sprawl of an installation.
- The size of a facility could hinder future development.
- Setbacks proposed by the County is not sufficient.
- Noise from construction would be disruptive in the rural environment, especially noise derived from pile driving.
- Loss of rural character

Hazards/Health Concerns

- The batteries are a potential fire hazard.
- Solar panels are susceptible to extreme weather events, and damage to the panels could cause part of the installation to be inoperable and affect regional energy output.
- Dangerous health side effects.

SUPPORT CONTINUED

Agriculture Benefits

- Blending the use of solar with other agricultural uses (i.e., sheep grazing, apiaries, or other such uses).

Energy Grid Benefits

- Diversifies the energy needs of the county.
- Reduce the rate of energy to ratepayers.

Other Local Benefits

- Creates jobs by construction, land clearing, panel installation, and energy grid connection.

OPPOSITION CONTINUED

Other Local/National Impacts

- The power generated by utility-scale solar in Johnson County will not stay in Johnson County and will not directly benefit Johnson County residents.
- Reduction of property values.
- Local jobs created would be temporary; i.e., only during construction of the project.
- The infrastructure (solar panels) would be manufactured outside of the United States.

Agriculture Concerns

- Agricultural lands are a finite resource.
- Use of herbicides for vegetative growth management could harm adjacent farming activities.
- Does not consider this use as “agriculture” and should be taxed the same as an industrial use.

Energy Grid Impacts

- Destabilization of the electric grid and an increase cost to ratepayers.

State-Wide Energy Concerns

- The high subsidies attached to solar facilities.
- Kansas has excess energy supply.

Environmental Concerns

- Possible impacts beyond the project boundaries, which include:
 - wildlife/wildlife corridors,
 - surface and ground water quality,
 - flood plain,
 - soil erosion,
 - county’s history,
 - Increased traffic, and
 - a facility would create a “photovoltaic heat island effect.”

OPPOSITION CONTINUED

Decommissioning Concerns

- The solar industry leaves “a trail of waste.” An effective recycling program for solar panels must be created. Moratorium is requested until there are government policies, infrastructure, and foresight in panel design that makes solar panels recyclable.
- Johnson County does not have the landfill space to support discarded solar panels.
- The potential cost to recycle solar panel materials could be cost-prohibitive.

Urban County

- A 20+-year CUP is too long.
- Johnson County is too populated of a county; relocate further west where there is less dense population.
- Should be located at the Sunflower Ammunition Plant near De Soto.