

## EXHIBIT B

# RENEWABLE ENERGY AND FARMLAND PRESERVATION IN GREENE COUNTY AMENDMENT

## **RENEWABLE ENERGY AND FARMLAND PRESERVATION IN GREENE COUNTY**

It is important to begin this section with reiterating the goals developed during the Perspectives 2040 planning process. Steering committee and public input resulted in six overarching goals to develop Greene County's long-term vision and to lay the foundation for future land use decisions. It became very clear during the process that protecting agricultural use and prime farm soils is a priority with both the steering committee and the public and that prioritization did not vary with comments received during location-based focus group sessions regardless of whether the participants were from urban or rural areas. This narrative has not really changed over time since the original adoption of Perspectives back in the 1970's. The following are the Perspectives 2040 goals:

- Focus on Strategically Balanced Land Development
- Protect Farmland
- Expand and Diversify the Local Economy
- Revitalize Existing Communities
- Preserve Natural Resources
- Enhance Quality of Life

General farmland preservation policies carried forward into Perspectives 2040 remain unchanged as follows:

- To promote and protect agriculture as a primary use of land in rural Greene County.
- To encourage and promote the majority of anticipated future population growth within the established Urban Service Boundaries of Greene County.
- Future growth within the Urban Service Boundaries shall be in an orderly manner in the interest of the individual community and all county residents.
- To direct development to nonagricultural areas of the county.
- To protect farmers' ability to maintain and expand their level of agricultural activities in accordance with local and State regulations.
- To maintain and enhance our County's quality of life, to be fundamentally fair to all citizens and to respect their individual property rights.

Agriculture in Greene County is not only an important industry creating thousands of permanent jobs in Greene County, it is a way of life, a heritage passed on for generations for many of our residents. Vast agricultural landscapes, trails, parks, open spaces, neighborhoods, and employment centers all work together to make Greene County one of the best places to live in Ohio. Perspectives 2040 seeks to balance development and farmland preservation by guiding development to urbanized areas and to locations within the urban service boundary that are better suited for non-agricultural use. In the past, development pressures to convert prime farmland to other uses were somewhat traditional, such as conversion to residential or commercial uses or both. Today, however, there exists a new challenge to agricultural use protection and prime soils preservation in the form of utility-scale and less than utility-scale renewable energy projects.

Over the past decade, the state of Ohio has experienced growing demand for utility-scale renewable energy projects and subsequently for land. State and federal tax incentives, business renewable energy goals, state and federal energy policies, technology improvements, and lower cost of production have advanced solar and wind energy to the forefront to make utility-scale renewable energy projects more cost effective to develop. In Ohio, the Ohio Power Siting Board (OPSB) has the sole authority to approve, disapprove, or modify and approve applications for certificates for major utility facilities (Ohio Revised Code 4906). This includes utility-scale solar and economically-significant wind farms. This, in effect, runs counter to land use decision authorities granted to local government and review agencies provided in the revised code. It is also counter to the current and soon to be adopted land use plans which place an emphasis on local decision-making based on a coordinated plan. Wind and solar projects, whether utility-scale or less, should be under the authority of local government just as with any other major land use decision. Local jurisdictions have worked hard to create a sense of community, to define who they are and what they want to be in the future.

The challenge is how do we address the clear goals of the people of Greene County, the plan to preserve agriculture use, protect prime farmland soils, and protect our natural and open spaces, while promoting renewable energy. Again, to reiterate, these goals were verified through public engagement during this planning process and are consistent with previous land use planning efforts. Since the inception of the Regional Planning & Coordinating Commission of Greene

County, a commission composed of elected officials who represent each member jurisdiction in Greene County, there is a trackable record of using the Farmland Preservation Plan as a tool to preserve farmland and approving or denying proposed projects based on compliance with this plan. Data analysis for Perspectives 2040 provides quantitative data proving that this coordinated effort on behalf of multiple jurisdictions, for several decades, have been successful in actually growing the number of farms across the county, despite the amount of development that concurrently occurred. It appears there is a conflict that is not easily addressed. Renewable energy itself is not an issue with most Americans nor with residents of Greene County. Public opinion toward renewable energy is generally positive. One of the main concerns with utility scale solar and wind projects is the size of these facilities. Further, Greene County places great emphasis on protecting and growing its tourism economic base that relies on exceptional natural, scenic, recreational, and cultural resources, and the outstanding visual landscape leading to these destinations where industrial-scale solar and wind facilities would be inconsistent with the existing land use character that so well defines and surrounds these treasures.

Particularly, utility-scale solar is a land intensive endeavor consuming massive tracts of land and in most cases prime farmland. The Farmland Owners Guide to Solar Leasing states, “According to the National Renewable Energy Laboratory report, the average total direct land requirements for photovoltaic solar projects greater than 20 MW is 7.7 acres per MW for fixed-tilt systems”, and higher for other tracking systems<sup>1</sup>. As of April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2021, the Ohio Power Siting Board (OPSB) has approved 12 - utility-scale solar projects equal to 2,089 MW and 23,012 acres with another 26 – utility-scale solar projects either in the pending or pre-application status totaling 4,558 MW and 41,110 acres, of which, a majority of land can be assumed as classified as farmland<sup>2</sup>. The American Planning Association’s, *Planning for Utility-Scale Solar Energy Facilities*, states, “Agricultural and forested areas are typical sites for utility-scale solar facility uses. However, the use of prime agricultural land (as identified by the USDA or by the state agencies) and ecologically sensitive lands (e.g., riparian buffers, critical habitats, hardwood forests) for these facilities should be scrutinized” (PAS MEMO-September/October 2019, pg. 4).

## **POLICIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following policies and recommendations offered in this section are designed to help Greene County achieve the land use vision of Perspectives 2040 and to encourage renewable energy projects that meet the desired scale and type that will compliment the various character zones described in this plan. This policy shall be in effect until such time a more robust sustainable energy and resilience plan is explored.

A utility-scale renewable energy system is an energy system above a certain capacity that is intended to produce electricity to sell into the market. These systems are larger than small-scale residential or business installations and community systems often covering more land area.

### **Policies:**

1. Greene County supports limited utility-scale renewable energy systems with the following restrictions:
  - Shall not be located within the Urban Service Boundary or areas identified for economic development outside of the Urban Service Boundary.
  - Utility scale renewable energy projects shall be limited to a maximum of two (2) percent of land area outside of the Urban Service Boundary for each Township.
  - No utility-scale renewable energy facility shall be located within the viewshed of cultural, historic, scenic byways or historic corridors, current or proposed bike trails, or recreational resources of Greene County. As mentioned previously, Greene County has a strong tourist economy and is key to economic growth.
  - Setbacks from road rights-of-way, and parcel lines shall be a minimum of 300-ft for solar, or in the case of a wind turbine two times the height of the structure.
  - Shall not be located within a Special Flood Hazard Area identified on the latest Flood Insurance Rate Map; or within one mile of the Little Miami Scenic River; or within a wetland.
2. Greene County supports any landowner, business, or municipality desiring to install residential, business, and community systems related to alternative energy sources to lower energy costs related to their homes or businesses or community that are following locally adopted plans, zoning code, or renewable energy ordinance or resolution.
3. Greene County shall review proposed utility-scale renewable energy project site plans and construction plans within unincorporated areas. This review shall be performed by the Regional Planning and Coordinating Commission of Greene County, the County Engineer, and the Township in which the project is proposed. The review shall ensure the land use compatibility and character of the project, a review of transportation needs, storm water and sediment and erosion control, viewshed analysis, compliance with the

thoroughfare plan, compliance with the Master Trails Plan, and compliance with local plans.

4. A Roadway Use Agreement approved by the County Engineer is required for all utility-scale renewable energy projects.

**Recommendations:**

1. Develop a model renewable energy zoning resolution for use by Townships (See attached Greene County Model Large-Scale Solar Zoning Text).
2. Explore the need for a County resiliency plan that includes energy resilience.
3. Establish special districts for solar and wind projects under guidance of Senate Bill 52.

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Summary: Exhibit Cedarville Township Exh 1B electronically filed by Mr. Ken  
Spencer on behalf of Armstrong & Okey, Inc.