

Solar Work Group

Ad hoc Committee of the Urban County Planning Commission

Minutes

May 20, 2026

- I. Call to Order - Chair Zach Davis called the meeting to order at 11:00 a.m. ET (10:00 a.m. CT). The meeting was attended by committee members Zach Davis, Judy Worth, Frank Penn, and Mike Owens (Planning Commission); Hil Boone, Tom Eblen, and Dave Sevigny (Urban County Council). Staff members present were Traci Wade, Daniel Crum, Jim Duncan, and Ben Wolford (Division of Planning); Tracy Jones and Brittany Smith (Department of Law).

- II. New Business -

- A. Discuss schedule of meetings and goals

Chair Comments – Chair Davis indicated that due to time constraints, a secondary discussion would likely be necessary. He asked the Committee and staff for their future availability to establish a time and date for their next meeting.

Ms. Wade, Planning Manager, referred to a handout that outlined the timeline of required action regarding the Council initiated Zoning Ordinance Text Amendment.

The Committee decided that the next Solar Work Group meeting will be held on Tuesday June 9, at 10:00 a.m. ET (9:00 a.m. CT).

Commissioner Penn sought clarification on Council's proposed change to the zoning ordinance. Commissioner Worth questioned the leniency of the timeline of required action and inquired about the schedule.

Council Member Sevigny established the history of the Council initiated ZOTA and reaffirmed that the current phase required Planning Commission review and recommendation.

Mr. Duncan, Planning Director, reminded the Committee that this case must be heard by the Planning Commission within 60 days of it being initiated by the Council.

Commissioner Owens inquired about the Council's ability to give an extension to the required final hearing date.

Ms. Jones, Department of Law, confirmed that there was no flexibility on the matter, and that the statute must be followed.

Chair Davis emphasized that the goal of this meeting was to orient the Planning Commission, through Council and stakeholder comment, with the proposed amendment to Article 31: Solar Energy Systems.

- B. Discuss amendment to Article 31: Solar Energy Systems as initiated by the Urban County Council.

III. Stakeholder Comment

Brittany Roethemeier, Executive Director of Fayette Alliance, presented historical and contextual information to the Committee regarding the proposed amendment to Article 31. She stated that in 2024, the Planning Commission voted unanimously to regulate solar energy systems in appropriate zones and prohibit large-scale solar projects in agricultural zones. She also stated that in 2025, the Urban County Council voted to uphold the Planning Commission's recommendation.

Ms. Roethemeier indicated that the Fayette Alliance opposes industrial scale solar development in agricultural zones for the following reasons:

1. Contrary to the intent of agricultural zones
2. Does not align with the 2045 Comprehensive plan
3. Sets a dangerous precedent
4. Does not create significant economic development
5. Goes against national practices to avoid farmland and soils of statewide significance
6. Other extensive opportunities exist for innovative solar development in Fayette County.

Alison Davis, Professor of Agricultural Economics at the University of Kentucky, stated that even though solar development isn't as widely debated as data centers, it still has negative impacts on farmland in Fayette County. She indicated that due to the timeline between agreements made and the implementation of development causes strife in communities she has visited. She emphasized that solar contractors target prime soil and farmland because it would cost developers more money to integrate solar panels into marginal land.

Professor Davis mentioned that large scale solar operations affect the viewshed and stated that seeing solar panels on prime farmland alters the visual characteristics of what makes Lexington unique to tourists. She suggested that the Urban County Council perform a viewshed study to ensure that solar panels will not be visible.

Committee Comment – Commissioner Worth sought clarification on the process of decommissioning a solar farm, and if there is a way to preserve soil quality and structure through said process.

Professor Davis responded by stating that there is not enough information to factually know the impact to soil structure and quality of decommissioning.

Council Member Sevigny stated that while he thinks the viewshed is important by concept, when he sees solar development, he acknowledges the investment of the landowner to assist in the creation of new infrastructure and stated that he does not view it negatively. He also expressed that he believes that farming and solar production can coexist.

Commissioner Penn stated that farmland in central Kentucky is a finite resource. He indicated that he is concerned about the future of Kentucky farmland if the Council opens the door to commercial uses on agricultural land.

Council Member Sevigny stated that he does not believe that a change to one percent of Fayette County agricultural land dramatically affects how people view Lexington. He also emphasized that the reason Council added caps and restrictions to the ordinance was to show that they value Kentucky farmland and the character that it provides to Fayette County.

Commissioner Owens acknowledged the need for solar energy but questioned its ability to bring jobs and tax benefits to Lexington. He expressed concern about solar developments providing less benefit to the community than the established use they would replace.

Council Member Boone stated that he did not agree or vote to approve any of Council's proposed changes, noting that his constituents in Council District 12 would be some of the most impacted.

Chair Davis stated that the Urban Service Area boundary fully extends south to the Jessamine County line because the soil quality is less favorable than northern Fayette County land. He expressed that decision was made in the 70's as a consideration to assist in the preservation of prime soil.

Commissioner Owens requested that staff compile a listed map of all brownfields in Fayette County.

Commissioner Worth added that she would also like staff to provide a soil quality map overlaid on Commissioner Owens' requested brownfield map.

Chair Davis stated that the next meeting should focus on information, and asked Council Member Boone if he knew of anyone from Council District 12 that would like to attend the meeting to provide community comment.

Council Member Boone offered to engage with the community to see if any farmers or community members would agree to be present.

VII. Adjournment – Chair Davis adjourned the meeting at 12:40 p.m. ET (11:40 a.m. CT)

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