



**Remarks from Shruti Bhatnagar, Chair of the Sierra Club Montgomery County Group
Presented at the Aug 27th webinar on
“Solar Power & Agriculture in Montgomery County: Opportunities and Risks”**

In late 2019, The Sierra Club Montgomery County group was asked to consider the proposed Zoning Text Amendment that will allow a limited amount of solar projects serving multiple county residents to be built in our Agricultural Reserve. The Sierra Club did not initiate the ZTA – but on due consideration, internal discussion, and review of our national and state policies - *and after making some recommendations to improve it, and seeing several substantive improvements*, - we now support it.

We understand this is a complicated and sometimes contentious issue. There has been a lot of information circulated that in many cases is incomplete, inaccurate, or even misleading. This webinar aims to present important fact-based information that underlies our position.

The webinar isn't set up as a debate – those who have a different position than ours have widely circulated their opposition and concerns. We will, however, be addressing as many as possible of the hard questions that are out there, from why we can't build all the solar we need somewhere else, to the issue of soil types, and more.

We'll also be providing some new and very interesting perspectives on solar.

But before we turn to those presentations, I want to put our position in the context of Sierra Club's highly respected environmental work and our policies. Sierra Club is above all a conservation organization. We work to protect our precious natural environment, and in that way we have common cause with farmers and land preservationists.

However, in the world we live in right now, the relentless reality of climate change threatens all of our environment, as well as the health and well-being of people everywhere – including farmers.

As we considered this ZTA, this reality of climate change was the overriding determinant. It's not a future threat – here in Maryland we've seen everything from intense heat waves to multiple 100-year floods in Ellicott City, to water in the streets of Annapolis. There has been documented change of our growing season.



The IPCC has put us on notice that we have just 10 years to make unprecedented progress in reducing our greenhouse gas emissions. Our county itself has ambitious goals for greenhouse gas reduction – 80% by 2027. Every year we don't take effective action, these goals just become less achievable.

There are many things we'll need to do to reach these goals. But cleaning up the electricity sector – moving off fossil fuels to wind and solar – is the area where we have the proven, low-cost, scalable technology to do it now. Increasing energy efficiency, changing to electric cars, trucks and buses, and moving to all-electric buildings, will take a lot longer... and will use even more electricity. But making this happen means building solar on open land.

Every county in Maryland is dealing with this issue of the need to put some solar on agricultural land. Our state and local Sierra Club members have worked with local government in multiple counties in their deliberations about this challenge. In our case, the vast majority of our agricultural land is in the Ag Reserve.

In every case, we follow the approach established in our National and Chapter-level policies on solar energy siting: that it's possible to achieve solutions that balance respect for agriculture and for land with the urgent need to address climate change. We believe that the proposed ZTA, with the modifications that have been made, is such a balanced approach.

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