



COUNTY OF ALBEMARLE
Department of Community Development
401 McIntire Road, North Wing
Charlottesville, Virginia 22902-4596

Phone (434) 296-5832

Fax (434) 972-4126

December 21, 2017

Seth Maughan
Solunesco, LLC
1818 Library Street, Suite 500
Reston, VA 20190

RE: ARB-2017-96: Rivanna Solar

Dear Seth,

The Albemarle County Architectural Review Board, at its meeting on Monday, December 18, 2017, completed an advisory review of the above-noted request to establish a solar-energy electrical generation facility. The Board, by a vote of 4:0, forwarded the following recommendation to the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors:

Solar panels are considered equipment. The Entrance Corridor design guidelines state that equipment should be located to eliminate visibility from the EC; if, after appropriate siting, these features will have a negative visual impact, then screening should be provided to eliminate visibility. These guidelines primarily were meant to address mechanical equipment associated with buildings; they were not intended to address a solar-energy electrical generation facility of this scale. The ARB has not had the opportunity to establish guidelines specific to such a facility to date. Consequently, the ARB offers the following advice.

As currently proposed, even with the considerable landscape screening proposed along the portion of the development adjacent to the EC, and with the 35' buffer of retained young pines in other locations, portions of the solar installation will be visible from the EC. These views are not expected to be open, sustained views, which is a positive factor. At the completion of construction, and for a period of time, it is anticipated that there will be a degree of visibility of the installation through the young screening buffers adjacent to the EC. Other views will be at distances of at least 500' through parcels currently developed with residences, outbuildings, and/or wooded areas. Other views will be fully screened by off-site wooded areas, most of which is not controlled by the applicant. Because views of the facility will be available, the proposal does not meet the EC guidelines related to eliminating visibility of equipment. To eliminate all visibility, a significant amount of additional landscaping (and/or major changes to grading and/or size of the solar field) would need to be employed. It is likely that these alternatives are impractical. The revisions to the concept plan listed in A1, below, and the conditions on the Special Use Permit in B1, below, are recommended, with the understanding that there will be some visibility of the development from the Entrance Corridor. If maximizing screening to better match the equipment screening guidelines is the goal, the changes in A2 and the conditions in B2 would be appropriate. However, they may be impractical for a project of this scale and would still not meet the goal of complete screening.

A1. Required changes to the plan (to further reduce visibility)

1. Revise the landscape plan to eliminate conflicts among trees, utilities, easements, and rights-of-way. Screening shall have height differentiation and should incorporate understory plants to mitigate visibility. Shorter plants shall be planted as close to the EC as possible without conflicting with utility and other easements, followed by mid-sized and large trees. Some interspersed deciduous plants are acceptable, but the majority shall be evergreen. Show the planting height for at least 30 of the large EC buffer trees to be 7' minimum.
2. Revise the Conceptual Layout (sheet 1 of 2) to show the development area in the northeastern arm pulled back to align with the property line shared by parcels 47J and 47M. Show that existing vegetation north and east of this line shall be preserved.
3. At the west end of the EC buffer, add trees at the corner to increase screening and mitigate visibility.
4. Revise the easement documents to reference the appropriate parcels, to clearly show the tree preservation area, and to indicate that neither the owner nor the tenant will remove trees from the designated preservation area.
5. Clarify on the plan the location of wetlands and associated wooded area described in 5.3.3.
6. Revise the decommissioning plan to eliminate the option to retain the chain link fence.

B1. Recommendation on the Special Use Permit

The ARB recommends the following conditions:

1. The Entrance Corridor landscape buffer plan is subject to ARB review/approval. At least 30 of the large trees in the EC buffer shall be 7' high minimum at planting.
2. All inverter/transformer stations shall be located at least 700' from the EC edge of pavement.
3. All chain link fencing shall be removed from the development at decommissioning.
4. Revise the easement documents to reference the appropriate parcels, to clearly show the tree preservation area, and to indicate that neither the owner nor the tenant will remove trees from the designated preservation area.
5. The northeastern limit of the development area shall align with the property line shared by parcels 47J and 47M. Existing vegetation north and east of this line shall be preserved.

A2. Required changes to the plan (to attempt to eliminate visibility)

1. Revise the landscape plan to eliminate conflicts among trees, utilities, easements, and rights-of-way. Screening shall have height differentiation and should incorporate understory plants to mitigate visibility. Shorter plants shall be planted as close to the EC as possible without conflicting with utility and other easements, followed by mid-sized and large trees. Some interspersed deciduous plants are acceptable, but the majority shall be evergreen. Show the planting height for at least 30 of the large EC buffer trees to be 7' minimum.
2. Revise the Conceptual Layout (sheet 1 of 2) to show the development area in the northeastern arm pulled back to align with the property line shared by parcels 47J and 47M. Show that existing vegetation north and east of this line shall be preserved.
3. At the west end of the EC buffer, add trees at the corner to increase screening and mitigate visibility.
4. Revise the easement documents to reference the appropriate parcels, to clearly show the tree preservation area, and to indicate that neither the owner nor the tenant will remove trees from the designated preservation area.
5. Clarify on the plan the location of wetlands and associated wooded area described in 5.3.3.
6. Revise the decommissioning plan to eliminate the option to retain the chain link fence.
7. Revise the concept plan to show that on-site landscape buffers will be extended along property lines adjacent to parcels 47A, 47E, 47J, 47L and 47M.

B2. Recommendation on the Special Use Permit

The ARB recommends the following conditions:

1. The Entrance Corridor landscape buffer plan is subject to ARB review/approval. At least 30 of the large trees in the EC buffer shall be 7' high minimum at planting.
2. All inverter/transformer stations shall be located at least 700' from the EC edge of pavement.
3. All chain link fencing shall be removed from the development at decommissioning.

4. Revise the easement documents to reference the appropriate parcels, to clearly show the tree preservation area, and to indicate that neither the owner nor the tenant will remove trees from the designated preservation area.
5. The northeastern limit of the development area shall align with the property line shared by parcels 47J and 47M. Existing vegetation north and east of this line shall be preserved.
6. Extend on-site landscape buffers along property lines adjacent to parcels 47A, 47E, 47J, 47L and 47M.

If you have any questions concerning any of the above, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Margaret Maliszewski
Chief of Planning/Resource Management
434-296-5832 x3276
mmaliszewski@albemarle.org

cc: Sweeney, Carolyn P., 2427 Thomas Jefferson Pkwy, Charlottesville, VA 22902
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