MONTGOMERY COUNTY VIRGINIA
EST. 1776

Your paragraph text

SOLAR ENERGY OPEN HOUSE

Community Open House to review proposed changes to the Montgomery County Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance regarding large-scale solar energy facilities

EVENT DETAILS

August 9th @3-6pm
Government Center
Multi-purpose Room 2

WORK SESSION

Planning Commission Work Session to be held at 7pm, following the Open House

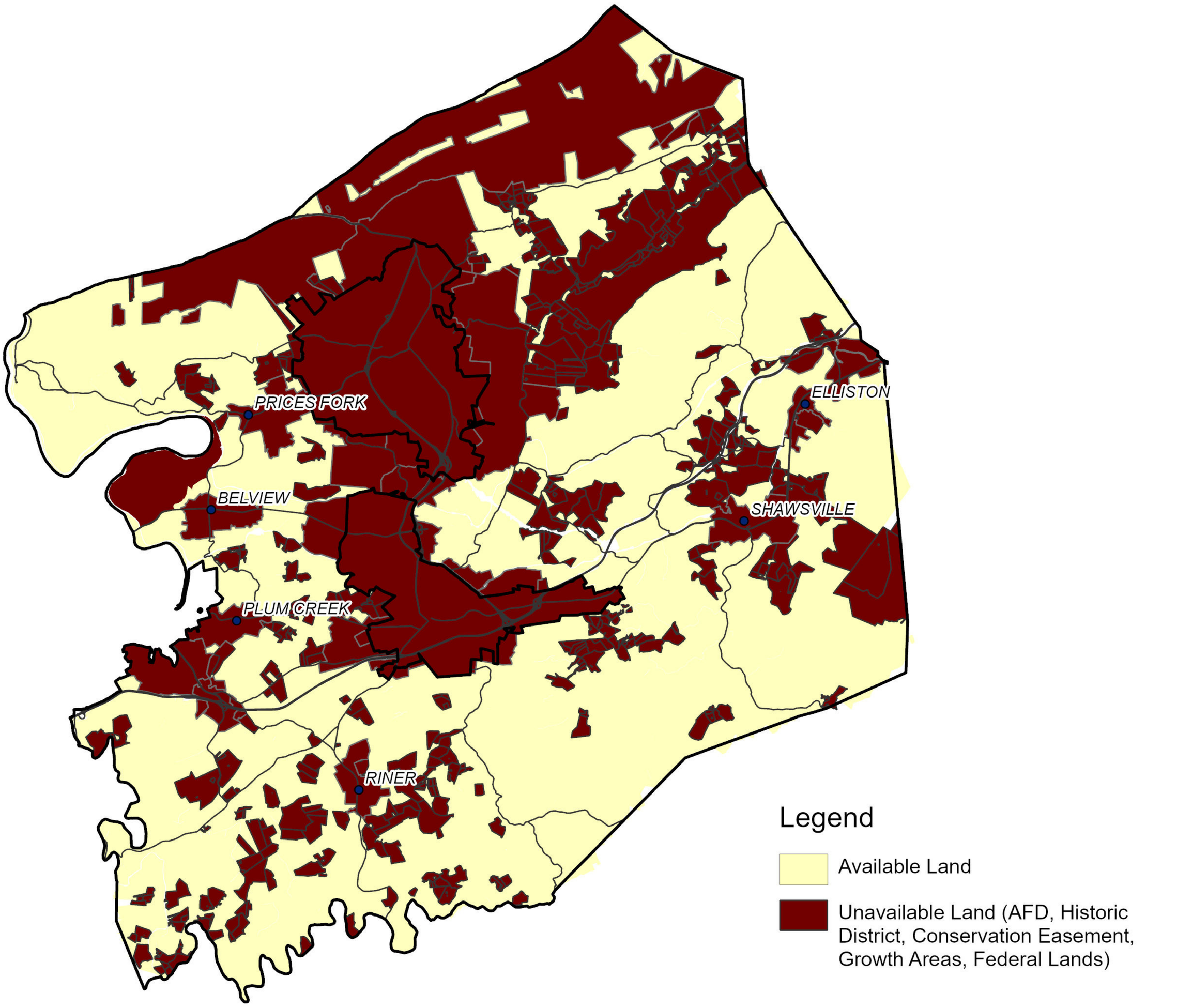
MORE INFORMATION

Learn more at montva.com/solar
Justin Sanders, Senior Planner
sandersjd@montgomery countyva.gov
540-394-2148

WELCOME!

Please sign in and let staff know if you have any questions

Where Should Solar Farms be Sited?



In determining where large-scale solar installations should be located within the County, the Solar Work Group evaluated both existing and future conditions.

The Work Group felt that it was important to preserve lands already identified for conservation within the County, such as those held in Agricultural and Forestal Districts (AFD), Conservation Easements, and Historic Districts.

Members of the Solar Work Group also felt that areas already earmarked for future growth, with existing or planned infrastructure to support commercial and residential development, were not ideal locations for large-scale solar. These growth areas include areas within the Urban Development, Urban Expansion, Village Expansion, Village, and Residential Transition Areas of the Comprehensive Plan.

While the proposed Comprehensive Plan amendments do not explicitly prohibit large-scale solar installations in these areas, they are discouraged.

MONTGOMERY COUNTY VIRGINIA
EST. 1776

Tools to Regulate Solar Development

The Comprehensive Plan

The Comprehensive Plan serves as a guiding document for development within the County over an approximately twenty (20) year period. This document outlines the County's goals and objectives in a number of different areas, including Land Use. It defines where the County intends to focus its growth efforts and outlines future plans to expand infrastructure, economic development, arts and culture, and other quality of life issues. The Comprehensive Plan is not a legally binding document, but serves as a vision for the future.

As the current Comprehensive Plan (adopted in 2004) does not address solar energy, the Solar Work Group proposes adding language related to solar energy to the Plan.

The Zoning Ordinance

The Zoning Ordinance is a set of legally binding development guidelines, adopted as part of County Code. The Zoning Ordinance outlines the specific regulations about how development occurs on project sites, including setbacks, landscaping, parking, and other components of development. The Zoning Ordinance requires the submission of a detailed site plan for all commercial projects, which ensures that the provisions of the Ordinance are met for all development.

The Zoning Ordinance was amended in 2015 to address solar energy systems, defining the various types of solar projects and detailing in which zoning districts solar was allowed. The Solar Work Group proposes a number of modifications and additions to the Zoning Ordinance related to solar energy systems. These proposed amendments increase the requirements for solar developers and landowners to ensure compatibility of the project with surrounding land uses.

Special Use Permit Application

Special Use Permits are an additional approval tool, allowing the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors to look at projects on a case-by-case basis. Special Use Permits allow the County to place additional regulations and conditions on proposed development within the County, on top of requirements outlined in the Zoning Ordinance. As proposed by the Solar Work Group, all large-scale solar energy facilities in the County must obtain an approved Special Use Permit. This additional review ensures that impacts to adjacent land owners are mitigated at the project level.

MONTGOMERY COUNTY VIRGINIA
EST. 1776

A Balanced Approach

The Solar Work Group has developed a series of policy goals for the Comprehensive Plan that attempt to balance the desire to permit large-scale solar energy systems in the County with concerns about maintaining the character of the County's rural areas. These policy goals are based on extensive research on how other localities across the Commonwealth have addressed solar development and on best practices shared by the American Planning Association and International City/County Management Association.

Balanced Land Uses

To ensure that solar energy facilities and battery storage facilities are part of a balanced development pattern within the County, the County desires to have no more than 1,500 cumulative acres of leased area occupied by solar energy and battery storage facilities throughout the County.

Project Scale

The size of solar energy and battery storage facilities should be carefully considered to ensure that the projects have no undue adverse impacts on nearby residential, commercial, and mixed-use properties. The County strongly discourages any project with a photovoltaic panel overage of more than 100 acres. Projects should not be sited on parcels adjacent to previously approved or existing solar facilities.

Encourage Shared Agricultural Use

To ensure continued use of agricultural lands for farming within the County, solar energy and battery storage facilities within the County should include agri-photovoltaics (APV) and/or ground cover that facilitates habitats for non-invasive native species and native pollinators.

Encourage Future Agricultural Use

To ensure that agricultural lands used for solar energy and battery storage systems may be returned to an active state of agricultural use in the future, top soil should be retained on all project sites housing these systems within the County.

MONTGOMERY COUNTY VIRGINIA
EST. 1776

Siting Considerations

In an effort to ensure that the siting of large-scale solar facilities considers adjacent land uses and future growth, the Solar Energy Work Group has proposed several policy goals concerning the locations for future solar energy projects within the County. The policy goals are aimed to minimize impacts to the County's agricultural, cultural, and historic resources.

Historic and Cultural Heritage Areas

Siting of projects in state or federally designated Historic Districts should be highly discouraged. Projects located outside, but adjacent to, these areas should be evaluated for any potential visual or other impacts associated with development.

Growth Areas

In order to ensure existing and future planned infrastructure is utilized to facilitate planned growth within the County, siting of solar energy and battery storage facilities should be highly discouraged within areas designated as Residential Transition, Urban Expansion, Village Expansion, and within Urban Development Areas.

Rural and Resource Stewardship Areas

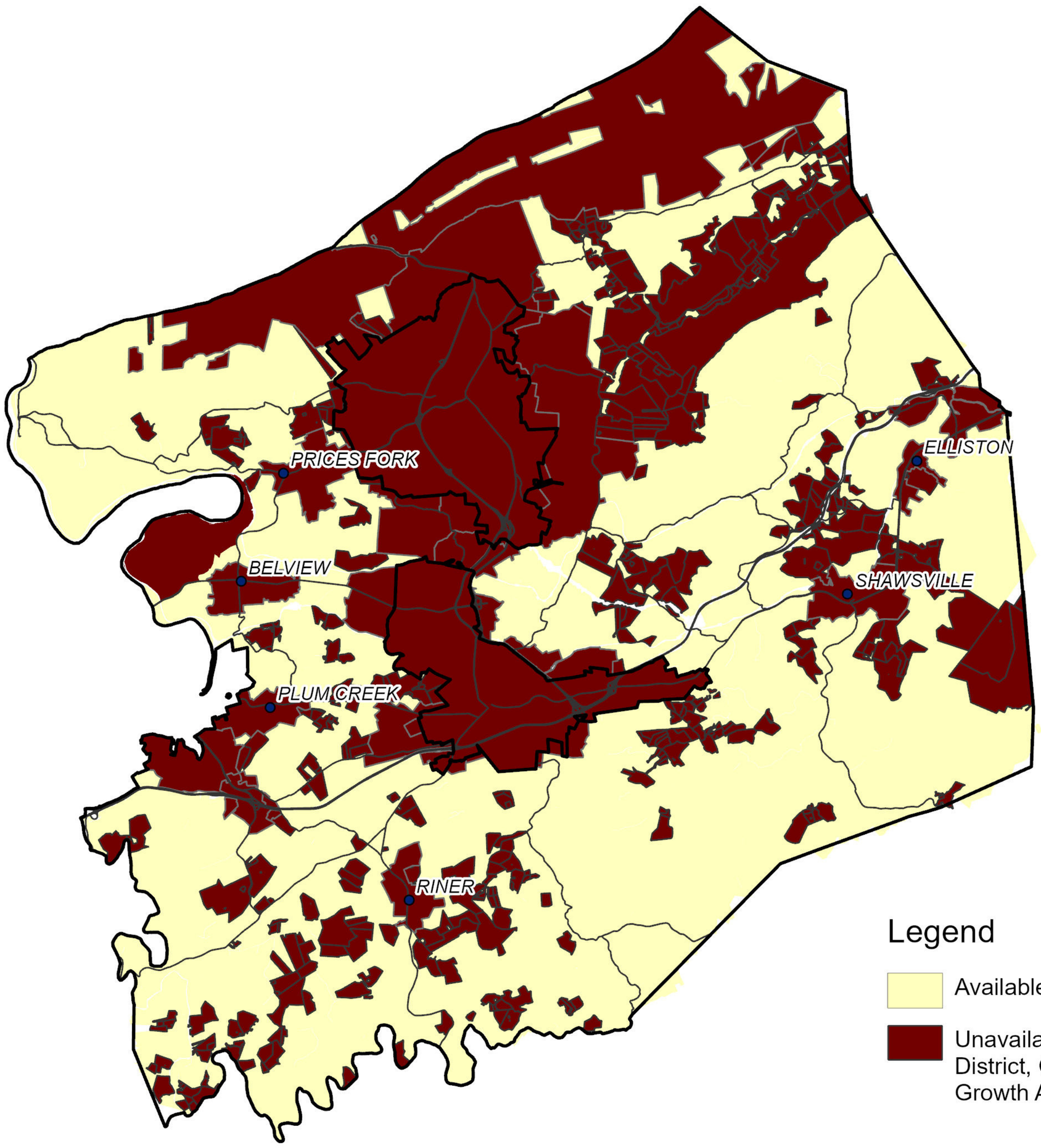
Siting of projects in areas designated as Rural and Resource Stewardship within the Comprehensive Plan should consider the presence of prime farmland producing soils or other natural resources. Further, projects should be highly discouraged within Agricultural and Forestal Districts and in areas held within a Conservation Easement. Projects located outside, but adjacent to, these areas, should be evaluated for any potential visual or other impacts associated with development.

Utilization of Land with Limited Development Potential

Siting of projects on lands that have increased limitations for development (brownfields, reclaimed coal mining sites, abandoned industrial sites, or agricultural lands with soil classifications not conducive to active farming) should be encouraged.

MONTGOMERY COUNTY VIRGINIA
EST. 1776

Available Land for Large-Solar Energy Systems



Total County Acreage	**248,609**	**acres**
Town of Blacksburg	12,679	acres
Town of Christiansburg	9,439	acres
Unincorporated Montgomery County	**226,491**	**acres**
Land Type		
Federal Lands	**21,720**	**acres**
Agricultural and Forestal Districts	**23,232**	**acres**
Conservation Easements	**17,239**	**acres**
Historic Districts	**9,717**	**acres**
Growth Areas	**25,897**	**acres**
Residential Transition	11,685	acres
Urban Development Area	821	acres
Urban Expansion Area	5,660	acres
Village Expansion Area	7,731	acres
Total Land Available for Solar	**136,830**	**acres**

The Solar Work Group determined that not all land within Montgomery County was suitable for the development of large-scale solar energy systems. The table and map shown here indicate the areas deemed available for solar development by the Work Group. These calculations formed the basis for the proposed maximum acreage cap of 1,500 cumulative acres.

MONTGOMERY COUNTY VIRGINIA
EST. 1776

Proposed Zoning Definitions

The Solar Work Group has proposed definitions categorizing large-scale solar energy systems into two distinct types: community scale and utility scale. These categories differ on the amount of energy generated by the solar energy system. The Work Group also proposes a defined use for battery storage systems, as these systems often are included as part of large-scale solar projects.

Battery energy storage system

A electrochemical device or system of devices that are charged via a solar energy system in which the energy is temporarily stored and discharged at a later time to provide electricity to a distribution network as needed. Such use shall be limited as an accessory use to a solar energy system, utility scale.

Solar energy system, community scale

A ground mounted solar energy system that connects to a distribution network which has the capacity to produce five or less megawatts.

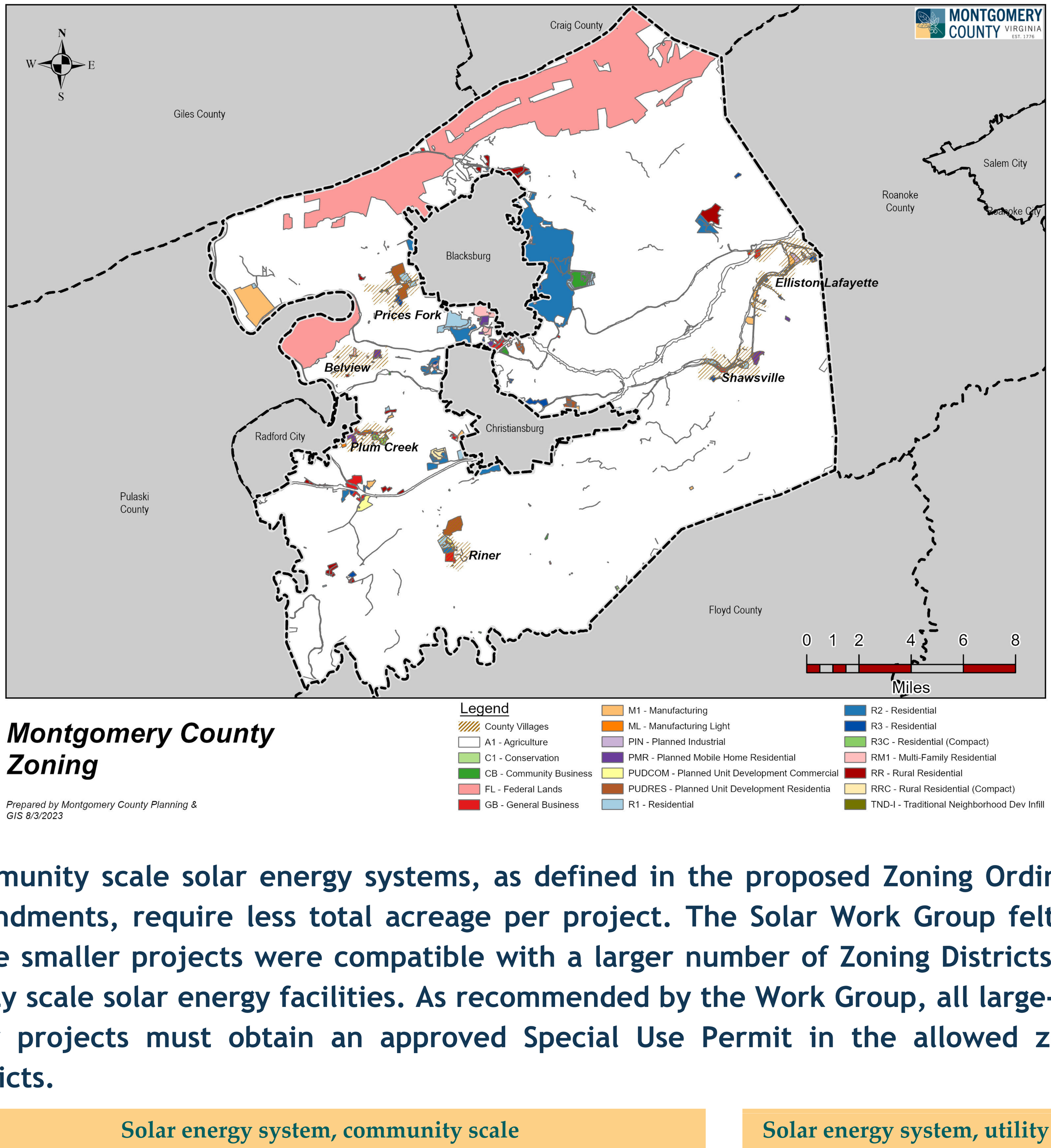
Solar energy system, utility scale

A ground mounted solar energy system that connects to a distribution network which has the capacity to produce more than five megawatts.

MONTGOMERY COUNTY VIRGINIA
EST. 1776

Large-Scale Solar by District

The Zoning Ordinance outlines in which zoning districts various uses are allowed, either by-right or by an approved Special Use Permit. The Solar Work Group evaluated a variety of factors in making the following recommendations on which zoning districts would be suited for the large-scale solar energy facilities within the County.



Community scale solar energy systems, as defined in the proposed Zoning Ordinance amendments, require less total acreage per project. The Solar Work Group felt that these smaller projects were compatible with a larger number of Zoning Districts than utility scale solar energy facilities. As recommended by the Work Group, all large-scale solar projects must obtain an approved Special Use Permit in the allowed zoning districts.

Solar energy system, community scale							
A-1 Agricultural	R-R Rural Residential	GB General Business	M-1 Manufacturing	M-L Manufacturing Light	PIN Planned Industrial	PUD-COM Planned Unit Development-Commercial	PUD-RES Planned Unit Development-Commercial
SUP	SUP	SUP	SUP	SUP	SUP	SUP	SUP

Solar energy system, utility scale			
A-1 Agricultural	M-1 Manufacturing	M-L Manufacturing Light	PIN Planned Industrial
SUP	SUP	SUP	SUP

MONTGOMERY COUNTY VIRGINIA EST. 1776

Proposed Regulations Concerning Solar

The Solar Work Group has proposed several regulations to mitigate the impacts of large-scale solar installations within the Zoning Ordinance. Some regulations for community-scale solar facilities and utility scale facilities differ slightly, but many regulations are proposed for both scales of solar development.

MONTGOMERY COUNTY VIRGINIA EST. 1776

How Much Solar?

The Solar Work Group has proposed to limit the total amount of land in the County available for solar developments to 1,500 acres. This total is approximately 1% of available land within the County.

How much <u>total land</u> do you think should be made available for large-scale solar projects in Montgomery County? *Place a dot below to share your opinion*.

MONTGOMERY COUNTY VIRGINIA
EST. 1776