

My Turn

Don't deny area solar plan, but institute better planning

Janet Mockovciak

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The view toward the mountains is soon to be altered as you drive along Hwy. 522 just north of the old Gorman estate. In addition to the rolling sage, scattering of houses and grazing cows, you will be looking at a vast solar array encompassing 7.7 acres with 3,888 solar panels. For perspective, this array is more than twice the size of the 3.5 acre array south of town on the UNM campus.

The county planning commission has approved this major development and it will be voted upon by the board of county commissioners on Aug. 30 at 11 a.m.

As a resident within view of this solar array, I have mixed emotions. While a believer in renewable energy and supportive of moving away from a reliance on fossil fuels, I have concerns about the location of such a large sea of solar panels in the middle of what has, to date, been an agricultural and residential area. A representative of the developer told me that Kit Carson plans to have 20 to 25 of these solar arrays scattered around the county as part of their distributed power system. That tells me that our residential neighborhood is only the first to encounter the prospect of an adjacent commercial scale, major development. That also leads me to believe that we have a responsibility to those neighborhoods potentially impacted across our community.

This is not an issue unique to Taos. It is being faced by communities around the state, country and the entire world.

Many communities have wrestled with concerns about impact on residential areas, farming, ranching, vegetation growth in the array area, animal migration patterns, ocular impact, view shed impact, maintenance, removal after periods of inactivity, etc. Many communities have taken advantage of guidelines to assist governmental bodies with integrating solar energy planning into local development regulations.

Taos County believes it is adequately covering these issues through its land use regulations, in addition to requiring an applicant to comply with the requirements of a major development permit and section 4.12 of the commercial solar generation performance standards and application requirements.

The neighbors adjacent to this proposed solar array are requesting that the transmission lines be buried from day one, that an earthen berm with vegetative screening be installed to mitigate the eyesore, that the inverters be hidden behind screening fencing, that the setbacks be increased from the proposed 35 feet and that there be a plan for removal of the panels after a period of inactivity. The existing approval from the county planning commission does not address any of this.

We do not think an eight-foot chain link fence with razor wire is aesthetically pleasing.

We do not agree that 35 feet is the appropriate set back given the visual impact of 3,888 solar panels and the noise of the inverters. We are also concerned that in the event the generation of electricity ceases at this location, that there should be a plan for removal of the array and remediation of the land.

While our preference would be to take the “NIMBY” (not in my backyard) approach, and have this commercial solar array located in a more appropriate location, we are not asking the county to deny the application. Instead we are asking them to minimize the quality of life impact by using the experience and examples of other communities around the globe for this location and other locations yet to be announced in Taos.

Mockovciak is a resident of Arroyo Seco.



The board of county commissioners is scheduled to vote on a new solar array project, similar to this one south of town, Aug. 30 at 11 a.m.

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