



General Government & Planning (GGP) Committee

July 1, 2025

Summary and Motions (Partial)

Committee members Liz Sheehan, Dan Wu, James Brown, Chuck Ellinger II, Shayla Lynch, Hannah LeGris, Emma Curtis, Whitney Elliott Baxter, Dave Sevigny, and Jennifer Reynolds were present. Council members Tyler Morton, Joseph Hale, Hil Boone, and Amy Beasley were present as non-voting members.

SOLAR ENERGY SYSTEMS (ZOTA-23-00003) (Sheehan/Sevigny)

As the item's co-sponsor, Chair Sheehan introduced the Zoning Ordinance Text Amendment (ZOTA) for Solar Energy Systems. This ZOTA aims to establish a regulatory framework for solar energy systems in Lexington and aligns with the Comprehensive Plan 2045, specifically the goal of achieving net-zero emissions by 2050. The chair explained to the committee and public that a presentation of the Planning Commission's recommended language would be given by Planning staff, followed by a presentation of an amended version given by Sevigny, the item's co-sponsor.

Daniel Crum, Principal Planner, explained that the ZOTA was a community-initiated proposal, not led by the Urban County Council. He outlined the structure of the ordinance, which was modeled after the Kentucky Resources Council's solar framework. He categorized solar energy systems as integrated, rooftop-mounted, or ground-mounted, with varying thresholds and implications. Crum noted that due to the applicant-driven nature of the ZOTA, planning staff were required to process the request within six months, limiting the time available for public engagement, particularly in rural areas. He emphasized the need for a future, more inclusive planning process for agricultural zones. He also presented maps showing the practical limitations of solar development, highlighting that only land near transmission lines and outside conservation easements would be viable for large-scale solar projects.

Sevigny, co-sponsoring the amendments with Chair Sheehan, explained that the proposal from Council included in the committee packet aligns with the 2045 Comprehensive Plan and the county's commitment to net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. He emphasized the importance of including agricultural areas in the solar zoning framework, arguing for equitable distribution of climate responsibilities. Sevigny proposed increasing the intermediate scale solar threshold from 5 to 10 acres to match the [Kentucky Resources Council](#) (KRC) model ordinance. He also added a definition for prime farmland, introduced a 2% cap on agricultural land eligible for large-scale solar, and outlined decommissioning and vegetative cover requirements to protect soil. The proposed amendments aimed to provide a thoughtful, legal, and enforceable pathway for integrating solar systems across all zones, including rural areas.

Reynolds questioned the enforceability of the proposed soil and topography protections for agricultural zones and expressed concerns about whether local ordinances could influence utility companies, which the Kentucky Public Service Commission regulates. She also sought clarification on the 2% land cap and how it was determined.

Baxter asked how Sevigny chose which parts of the KRC model ordinance to incorporate. She expressed concern over the enforcement of ground cover requirements and questioned the influence of Silicon Ranch, a for-profit corporation, in shaping the ZOTA. She suggested more public review was needed before moving forward.

Curtis challenged the quantifiable impact of the ZOTA on climate change goals, questioning whether the ordinance would truly help Lexington achieve net-zero emissions. She expressed concern about including agricultural zones without a broader public planning process, arguing that the urban portion of the county should not bear the entire burden of climate initiatives.

Wu emphasized the importance of setting ambitious goals like net-zero emissions, even when specific implementation steps are uncertain, supporting the ZOTA as one tool among many for achieving sustainability.

Brown inquired about the [SolSmart designation](#) and its requirements. He also expressed concerns about engagement equity, noting that similar efforts should be made to include underserved urban communities in planning decisions. He emphasized that climate change disproportionately affects marginalized communities and called for a framework that prioritizes clean energy access.

Boone voiced skepticism about fast-tracking solar projects in agricultural zones. He recommended creating a dedicated workgroup to examine long-term impacts, including soil protection and decommissioning. Boone questioned deviations from the KRC model ordinance and advocated for a more cautious, deliberative approach.

Lynch supported the amended ZOTA, describing it as necessary groundwork for achieving the city's sustainability goals. She emphasized the need for unity across urban and rural communities and rejected the idea of dividing responsibility based on geography.

Morton stressed the importance of equal community engagement, particularly with historic African American neighborhoods. He supported a deeper investigation into how solar zoning would impact diverse communities and hoped for broader discussion with the full council.

Baxter backed the idea of forming a new working group to evaluate solar development in rural areas. She maintained skepticism about large-scale rural solar projects.

Ellinger motioned to approve as amended, Solar Energy Systems (ZOTA-24-00003), as recommended by the Planning Commission. Seconded by Reynolds. The motion passed 8 – 2 (Yes: Brown, Ellinger, LeGris, Curtis, Sheehan, Baxter, Sevigny, Reynolds; No: Wu, Lynch)

Wu motioned to amend and accept the redlined version presented by Councilmember Sevigny. Seconded by Lynch. The motion failed 4 – 6. (Yes: Wu, Lynch, Sheehan, Sevigny; No: Brown, Ellinger, LeGris, Curtis, Baxter, Reynolds)

Wu motioned to postpone the decision on the ZOTA to the December 2 General Government & Planning Committee meeting. Seconded by Baxter. The motion failed 4 – 6. (Yes: Wu, LeGris, Sheehan, Baxter; No: Brown, Ellinger, Lynch, Curtis, Sevigny, Reynolds)

Curtis motioned to amend and include Sec. 31-5. General Requirements Applicable to Integrated and Rooftop Solar Energy Systems from the amended version. Seconded by Reynolds. The motion passed unanimously.

Sevigny motioned to report Solar Energy Systems (ZOTA-24-00003) as amended to the full Council at the August 19 Work Session. Seconded by Ellinger. The motion passed unanimously.

A full July 1, 2025 Committee Summary will be reported to the Council at the Work Session on September 9, 2025.