

O. Utilities (Amended July 28, 2021)

Goal 4: Coordinate with non-public utility providers including telephone, gas and electric services in order to ensure adequate provision of services.

Objective A: Achieve such coordination through the ongoing processes for Comprehensive Planning, CIP and land development project reviews.

Policy 1: Coordinated GIS Database System. Develop a coordinated GIS database system for mapping all applicable utilities, both public and private, located within the county.

Objective B: Improve the telecommunications infrastructure in the county to enhance economic growth, public safety, and communications services countywide.

Policy 1: Expand Broadband. Implement the recommendations of the county's telecommunications consultant to expand the broadband communications infrastructure to serve underserved areas. Consider public/private partnerships where beneficial.

Policy 2: Co-location. Ensure co-location opportunities are fully evaluated before permitting new wireless communications towers and require new towers to provide space for county emergency communication systems.

Objective C: Encourage distributed solar and carefully sited utility scale solar as a means of achieving renewable energy goals.

Policy 1: Economy. Recognize the employment opportunities, especially for distributed solar, and economic diversification opportunities that utility scale solar provide.

Policy 2: Rural viewsheds. Desire to maintain rural viewsheds and agriculture as a predominant component of our economy, but sees synergy among agricultural and rural land development and utility scale solar development so long as the clustering, size, or fragmentation of such facilities does not have undue adverse impact on the surrounding neighborhoods.

Policy 3: Agricultural landscape and economy. Siting of projects should evaluate the agricultural landscape of the project area and surrounding area to assess the effects of a project on the agricultural economy.

Policy 4: Prime farmland and Agricultural and Forestal Districts. Siting of projects in Agricultural and Rural Planning Policy Areas should consider the presence of prime farmland producing soils and/or adjacent Agricultural and Forestal Districts.

Policy 5: Visual impact. Siting of projects should take into consideration surrounding neighborhood developments and how visual impacts to those neighborhoods can be mitigated through appropriate buffers. Siting and design of projects should strive to utilize existing vegetation and buffers that exist naturally when adjacent to public rights of way or other adjacent property. In order to design and integrate buffers that succeed in mitigating the visual impact of a project on nearby development, projects should cover no more than 200 acres with photovoltaic panels.

Policy 6: Balanced land uses. Desire to balance the utility scale solar land use with other important and valuable land uses for our citizens. The size/extent of projects should be considered in proximity to other developed land uses so as not to have undue adverse impacts on the existence of nearby developed residential, commercial or mixed use communities. The County strongly discourages projects that have a photovoltaic panel coverage of more than 200 acres, and projects should not site on non-contiguous parcels or in close proximity to existing solar facilities. Consideration of existing Augusta County Service Authority infrastructure should be made.

Policy 7: Compact, interconnected development. Projects are strongly discouraged from siting partially or fully within Urban Service or Community Development areas in order to recognize the County's vision for compact, interconnected, and pedestrian-oriented residential and commercial development in these areas.

Policy 8: Open space. Support projects that seek to actively create opportunities and partnerships that provide for natural open spaces and outdoor recreational activities such as pedestrian corridors, wildlife watching areas, and fishing areas, especially in publically accessible land and rights-of-ways.

Policy 9: Interconnectivity. For projects that are adjacent to public spaces or other planned developments, encourage projects that provide for trails and linkages to adjacent land planned for or already developed.

Policy 10: Resource considerations. Projects should be designed, sited, and constructed in a way that protects and preserves the County's natural, scenic, and cultural resources including:

- a. Streams, rivers, wetlands
- b. Fertile soils
- c. Habitats
- d. Native vegetation
- e. Forests
- f. Historic and archaeological resources

Policy 11: Natural resource benefits. The County sees value in projects that create additional natural resource benefits through the use of native vegetation, the creation

of wildlife corridors, and the use of pollinator species in buffer areas and underneath panels.

Policy 12: Clustering and colocation. Support projects that site on contiguous parcels. Strong consideration should also be given to siting projects a reasonable distance away from existing solar facilities so as not to significantly alter existing community character or create undue adverse impact on nearby neighborhood development. Solar facilities that are sited on the same parcel or contiguous parcels, but are constructed in distinct phases, should be considered to be separate facilities for purposes of fully and accurately evaluating the potential impact on the surrounding community.