

ALERT

Solar, power lines among top priorities for county's farmers

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Staff photo by Ryan Marshall

Denny Remsburg, of the Frederick County Farm Bureau, moderates a discussion with County Executive Jessica Fitzwater, members of the County Council, and members of the Board of Education during a Farm Bureau legislative meeting Saturday.

Staff photo by Ryan Marshall

Rules around solar arrays and data centers, as well as a controversial power line project, will be among the items that Frederick County farmers will pay attention to in the coming year, members of the county’s Farm Bureau told officials at the bureau’s annual legislative meeting Saturday.

Property rights, including around issues such as solar, data centers, and housing, are the Frederick County Farm Bureau’s top priority, President Dave Burrier said before the meeting at the New Midway Fire Company Saturday.

The bureau will also focus on plans for the Maryland Piedmont Reliability Project, he said.

The project is for a high-voltage power transmission line proposed by the New Jersey-based company Public Services Enterprise Group, a 500,000-volt power line through Baltimore, Carroll and Frederick counties.

The Frederick, Carroll, and Baltimore county farm bureaus will all seek to intervene in the project, Burrier said.

“The power line issue, that’s front and center,” he said.

The Frederick County Council passed a resolution on Tuesday opposing the project, and saying PSEG’s proposed alignment for the MPRP would “directly and negatively impact 156 total parcels in Frederick County, most of which include residential structures.”

County Executive Jessica Fitzwater, members of the County Council, and the county’s Board of Education attended Saturday’s meeting to discuss issues around agriculture in the county with members of the farming community.

Fitzwater said during a presentation that the county has no legal authority over the power line project, but she and the council have both opposed the project, which cuts through many agricultural easements.

She said her office submitted a petition to intervene in the project on Thursday.

“It’s going to be a wild ride, people, let’s just say,” Fitzwater told the bureau’s members.

Meanwhile, the county is preparing to release a new agricultural strategic plan to guide its progress on agricultural issues, and has increased its goal for land preservation from 100,000 acres to 160,000 acres to be preserved by 2051, she said.

The county is also working on a study to help it identify appropriate and inappropriate sites for solar installations, Fitzwater said, and is closely monitoring state legislation on solar issues.

Councilwoman M.C. Keegan-Ayer briefed the bureau’s members on negotiations at the state level on solar facilities.

The Maryland Association of Counties has been working on compromise legislation with members of the General Assembly, said Keegan-Ayer, the association’s first vice president.

The state is trying to increase production of green energy, but counties are seeking more control over issues such as buffers and screening for solar facilities, she said.

A potential compromise with energy companies was upset recently with news that federal incentives for projects would be eliminated, causing solar companies to back away from the deal, she said.

They’re trying to figure out how to retain some county control over what projects look like, and making sure land will still be viable for farming after the solar arrays are removed, Keegan-Ayer said, but she acknowledged, “We have our work cut out for us.”

Discussion at Saturday’s meeting also included topics such as improvements and programs at Frederick County Public Schools’ Career and Technology Center and FCPS’s policy for excused and unexcused absences for students who attend and participate in programs at the Great Frederick

Fair.

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