

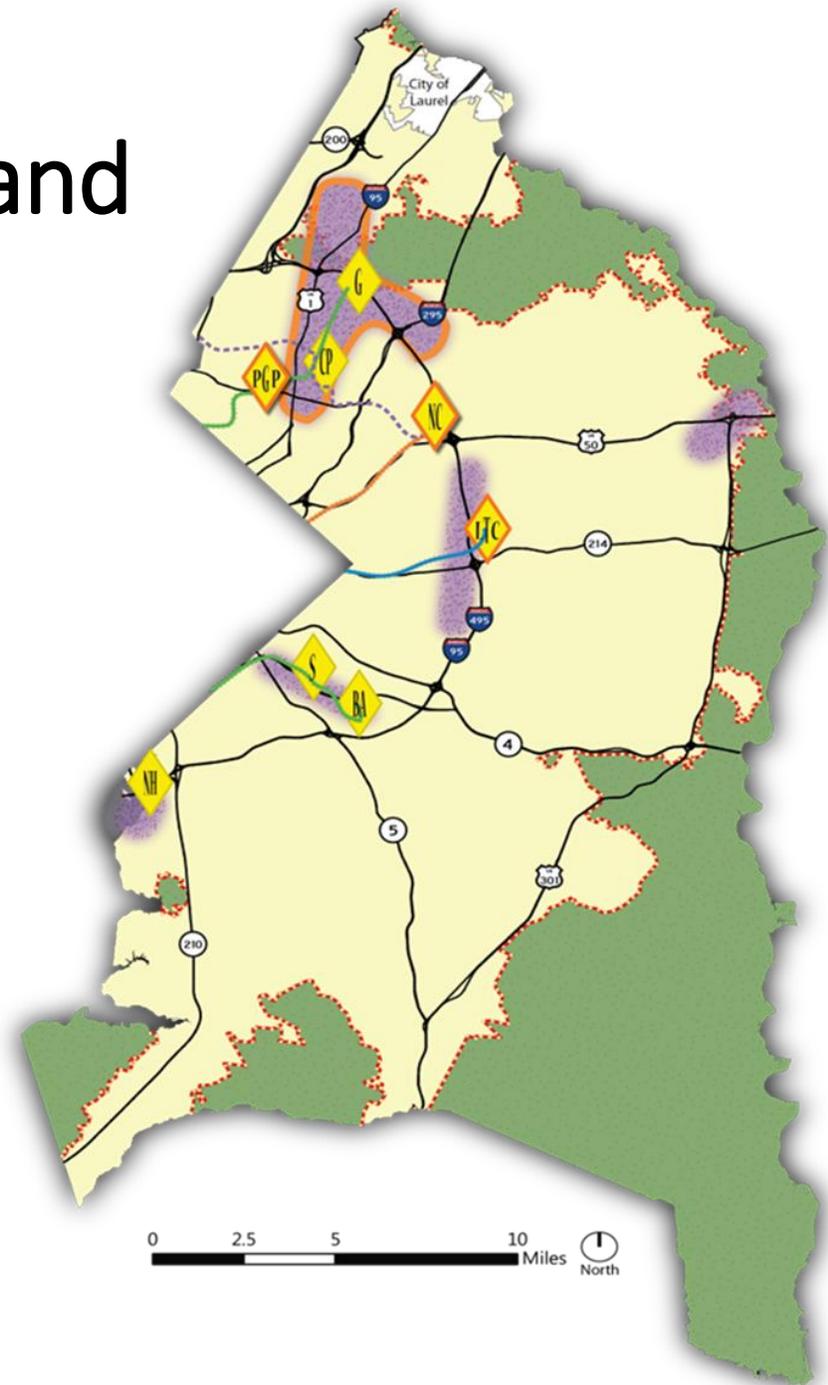
Solar Array Siting in Prince George's County, Maryland

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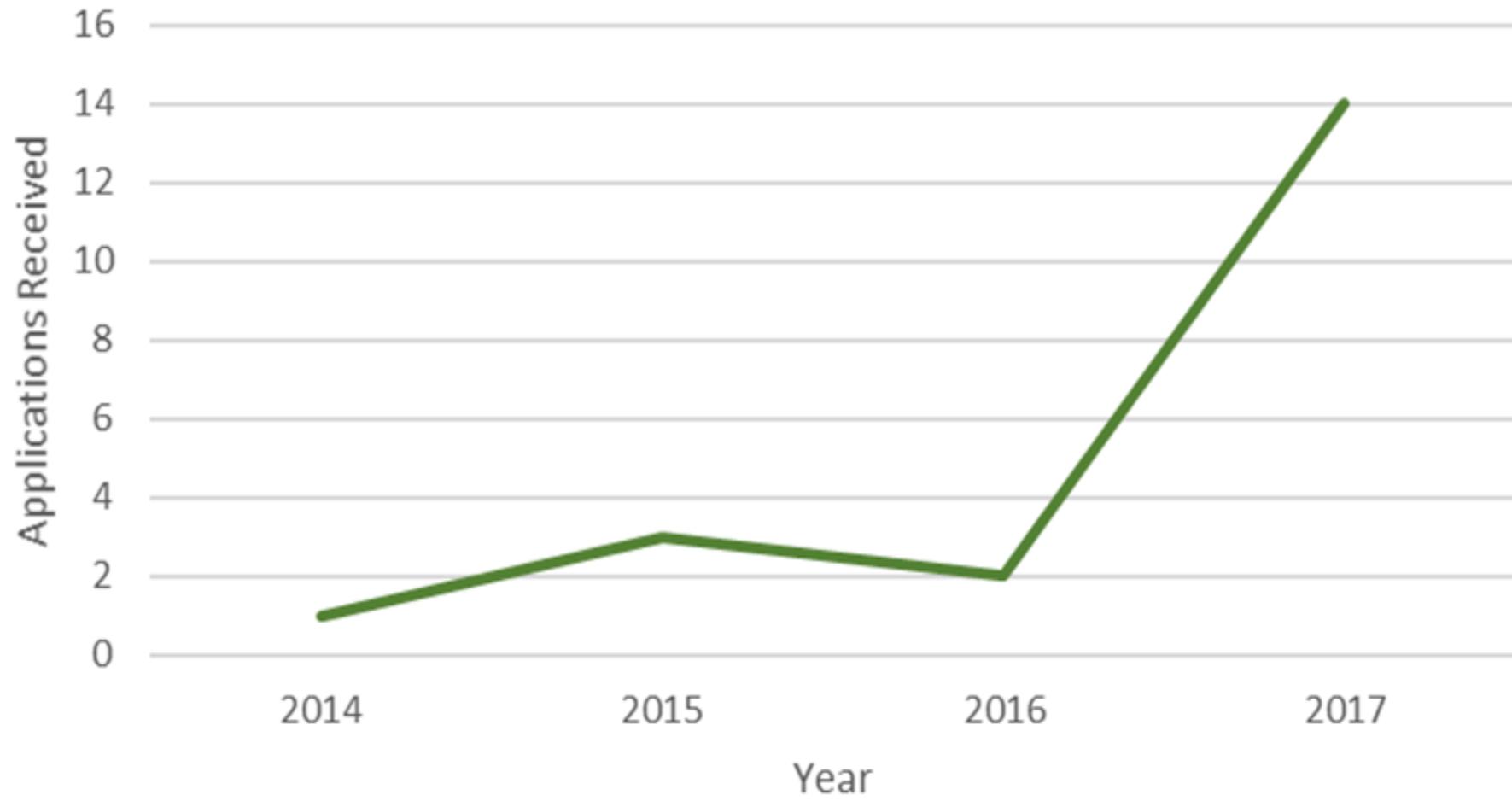
October 11, 2018

Prince George's County, Maryland

- 498 square miles
- 908,000 residents
- Borders Washington, DC
- 15 metrorail stations
- Median income in top 4% of all counties nationally
- One-third of county zoned for agriculture



Number of SES Applications



Farmland applications began to grow

2014-2017

5 solar energy systems approved,
only 1 on agricultural land.

Early 2018

14 solar applications pending,
6 on agricultural land.



Why So Much Interest in Prince George's County?

- ☀️ A lot of farmland close to three-phase transmission lines. Building connections to these lines costs about \$1 million per mile.
- ☀️ Leasing farmland an attractive source of income for farm families trying to keep the farm solvent.
- ☀️ County commitment to sustainable energy.



A unique statutory environment

State law (Land Use Article §§20-301 to 20-205) pre-empts local zoning in Prince George's and Montgomery Counties for public utility projects approved by Maryland Public Service Commission (PSC). Instead, county planning board reviews the project pursuant to **“mandatory referral.”**

- ☀️ Planning Board required to use **“uniform standards of review.”**
- ☀️ House Bill 1350 requires the PSC to take final action on SES applications only after **“due consideration”** of the consistency of the application with the jurisdiction's comprehensive plan and zoning.

Solar Arrays on Agricultural Land Working Group

- ☀️ Planning Department
- ☀️ Department of Permitting, Inspections, and Enforcement
- ☀️ Department of Environment
- ☀️ County Soil Conservation District
- ☀️ Office of Central Services



Prince George's County Solar Energy Systems (SES) Guidelines for Mandatory Referral Cases

Adopted by the Planning Board March 8, 2018

<https://www.mncppc.org/544/Mandatory-Referral>

Siting Preferences

SES will not be approved in:

- ☀ Chesapeake Bay Critical Area
- ☀ Mount Vernon Viewshed Area



SES discouraged:

- ☀ Prime agricultural land
- ☀ Significant cultural and natural areas (per master plans)
- ☀ Scenic viewsheds (per master plans)

Siting Preference Hierarchy (Most Desirable to Least Desirable)

- ☀️ Brown fields, reclaimed surface mines, closed land and rubble fills.
- ☀️ Industrial and commercial zoning districts.
- ☀️ Residential zoning districts.
- ☀️ Agricultural zoning districts (R-O-S, O-S, and R-A)
 - Within agricultural zones, a further hierarchy is established:
 - ☀️ Less productive agricultural soils (class IV through VIII) are preferred
 - ☀️ Prime agricultural soils (class I, II and III) “strongly discouraged”

Clearing of woodland

- ☀️ Clearing of woodland for SES “strongly” discouraged.
- ☀️ Clearing must be “unavoidable” and mitigated by reforestation or tree bank.

Screening and Buffering

☀️ County Landscape Manual, Section 4.7, “Public Utility Use or Structure” must be followed:

<https://www.mncppc.org/DocumentCenter/View/1352/Prince-Georges-County-Landscape-Manual---December-2010-PDF?bidId>

☀️ 40-foot wide wooded buffer for all scenic and historic roads and historic sites.



Fencing

- ☀️ Metal fencing should be non-reflective and black in color to minimize visibility. Fencing over seven feet in height is discouraged and razor wire of any type is strongly discouraged.

Lighting

- ☀️ All fixtures should be energy efficient, motion-sensor, full-optic cutoff, and downward casting such that light does not spill onto adjacent parcels or the night sky.

Pollinator-friendly ground cover

- ☀️ Pollinator-friendly ground cover should be planted around the panels, consistent with USDA guidelines: http://www.xerces.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/JobSheet_MD_CnsrvCvr.pdf

Decommissioning

- ☀️ Need a decommissioning plan that restores the land for agricultural use.



The record so far

- 9 SES approved by Prince George's County Planning Board
- 2 projects in operation
- 2 projects under construction
- 5 projects need additional permits from other agencies
- 1 project withdrawn after Planning Board signaled likely disapproval