



Solar Workgroup of Southwest Virginia Online Meeting Summary

November 6, 2020

Background and Executive Summary

The Fall Solar Workgroup took place as an online meeting on November 6, 2020. The Solar Workgroup of Southwest Virginia (Workgroup) is a group of nonprofit and community action agencies, colleges, state agencies, economic developers, and other interested citizens and businesses seeking to develop a renewable energy industry cluster in the seven coalfield counties of Southwest Virginia (SWVA). The workgroup was co-convened in 2016 by the UVA-Wise [Office of Economic Development & Engagement](#), [People Inc.](#) and [Appalachian Voices](#), with facilitation assistance from [Dialogue + Design Associates](#). The Planning Team includes co-conveners and the Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy, Southern Environmental Law Center (SELC), and paleBLUEdot. Additional background information is available at www.swvasolar.org.

The November 6th Solar Workgroup online meeting focused on member engagement around solar policy and refining the Workgroup's policy priorities for the 2021 Virginia General Assembly with input from diverse Workgroup members. Christine Gyovai of Dialogue + Design provided an agenda overview and outlined how Workgroup members would engage around the policy platform and goals for 2021 in several forums during the online meeting, including both a large group discussion supported by the online collaboration tool Jamboard and small breakout group conversations using Zoom.

During the meeting, Nick Polier with the Department of Mines, Minerals, and Energy (DMME) provided an overview of the Workgroup's history and progress to date on solar in SWVA. Participants were invited to complete a [survey](#) to help the Workgroup identify priority goals and action strategies for the year ahead. Then, Adam Wells with Appalachian Voices shared an announcement about the Workgroup's new partnership with Secure Futures called Securing Solar in Southwest Virginia. Tony Smith and Ryan McAllister with Secure Futures shared their hopes for this collaboration. This was followed by several Workgroup and partner updates on progress made on a number of fronts to bring tangible solar projects to the region, including a recent solar installation at Iron Works Cycling, and other efforts to develop

products that will make more projects possible. Carrie Hearne with DMME then provided a rich overview of the current policy landscape in SWVA, which was then contextualized by Chelsea Barnes with Appalachian Voices as it relates to the Workgroup's updated policy platform and opportunities for members to engage in policy advocacy and diverse action.

After these framing presentations, meeting participants were then guided through a large group discussion around policy engagement using Jamboard as a tool to collect their responses and ideas (with responses included below). After this, participants joined breakout groups where 3-4 participants engaged in informal conversations around solar policy in Virginia and opportunities for advancing the Workgroup's shared priorities in 2021 (responses are included below). These ideas were then brought back to the large group for a final conversation about how these suggestions may be incorporated into the Workgroup's activities moving forward. General presentation slides from the meeting are available [here](#) and Carrie Hearne's slides on Virginia's solar policy landscape are available [here](#). Finally, meeting participants with affiliations are listed at the end of this summary.

Full Meeting Summary

Solar Workgroup Overview

At the beginning of the meeting, Christine Gyovai of Dialogue + Design Associates welcomed participants to the meeting and asked each person to share their name and affiliation. Then, Nick Polier with the DMME provided an overview of the Workgroup's origins and achievements. Since 2016, the Workgroup has achieved some important milestones, including the publication of a Solar Roadmap for Southwest Virginia and Economic Impact Assessment for Southwest Virginia. The Workgroup has also released two Request for Proposals (RFPs) for solar development on buildings in the region. In 2019, eight localities worked with the Workgroup to achieve SolSmart assessment. Most recently, the Workgroup has entered a partnership with Secure Futures, Mountain Empire Community College, and GOT Electric to deploy commercial scale solar in the region. More information is available on the Workgroup's website: <http://www.swvasolar.org>.

Christine Gyovai also reviewed the four Workgroup's four primary goals and associated action strategies. A PDF of the Workgroup's goals and action strategies is available for review and download at this [link](#) and is also included in the presentation [slides](#). Meeting participants were encouraged, if they had not already done so, to complete the Workgroup's [survey](#) that will help the group assess which goals to prioritize in their work moving forward in 2021.

Secure Futures Partnership Announcement

Next, Adam Wells with Appalachian Voices shared an exciting announcement about a recent partnership that the Workgroup launched with Secure Futures LLC based in Staunton, VA,

Mountain Empire Community College (MECC), and GOT Electric called “Securing Solar for Southwest Virginia.” This initiative will provide commercial-scale solar installations in the coalfield region that are specifically designed to employ local workers. For more information on the partnership please see this [link](#). Adam noted that one of the things that stood out about Secure Futures when the Workgroup was selecting a solar development company to partner with was Secure Futures’ existing relationship with MECC and their commitment to developing a pipeline for building the next generation of solar installers and developers.

Tony Smith, founder of Secure Futures Solar, and Ryan McAllister, acting CEO, provided additional comments about their excitement to work with the Workgroup on getting tangible solar projects on schools, businesses, and in communities and to advancing workforce development opportunities. Tony highlighted that Secure Futures is currently working with Lonesome Pine Solar, led by Skip Skinner, to explore solar development on schools, businesses, and multi-family housing units while also working to advance state-level policy in Virginia that will open up more opportunities for solar development. Ryan shared that Secure Futures is planning a series of webinars, including a “BYOB” or “bring your own bill” webinar, on November 17th where participants will be encouraged to bring their own electric bill to discuss cost savings with solar. Secure Futures is also coordinating with MECC to host a spring Solar Job Fair. Finally, Ryan shared that he is excited that Secure Futures will be extending an offer shortly to a project manager based in Big Stone Gap, VA to coordinate projects for Lonesome Pine Solar. They hope to continue to build employment opportunities in 2021.

Solar Workgroup and Partner Updates

Utility Scale Solar Playbook

Adam Wells of Appalachian Voices provided a brief update on a GO Virginia grant that the Workgroup received last year to work with the Solar Foundation, DMME, the University of Virginia, and the National League of Cities to develop a Utility Scale Solar Playbook for Southwest Virginia. This will provide a step-by-step guide for county officials and local leaders to understand how to advance utility scale solar projects in their communities from site identification and considerations to navigating regulatory challenges to realize tangible projects. The purpose of this manual is to provide support to county officials and local leaders who need to understand a rapidly changing and complex policy landscape for solar in SWVA. The Utility Scale Solar Playbook is expected to be released on December 8th with a webinar targeting county officials and priority users. Adam shared that the Workgroup is also in the process of proposing another grant request to GO Virginia focused on implementation and helping local manufacturers expand to the battery and electrification industries. The Workgroup hopes to hear good news from the GO Virginia Regional Council early next year about the implementation request.

Iron Works Cycling Solar Installation

Chelsea Barnes of Appalachian Voices shared that on Friday, October 30th, Iron Works Cycling in Big Stone Gap, VA became the first solar project installed in the region through the Workgroup's commercial scale solar RFP. It is a 16 kilowatt system and was installed by Sigora Solar. Chelsea shared that the owners of Iron Works Cycling, Bobby Bloomer and Lorenzo Rodriguez, are very enthusiastic solar advocates and are excited to use the solar panels on their roof as a conversation starter with others in the community. Images taken during the solar installation, including some by drone, are available in the presentation slides [here](#). Additional information is available [here](#) in an article published in the *Times News* and in a more recent story linked [here](#) written by Elizabeth McGowan with the *Energy News Network*.

Solar Policy Landscape in Southwest Virginia

After providing a brief overview of the online collaboration tool Jamboard and how it would be used by meeting participants to share their perspectives on solar policy priorities, Christine Gyovai introduced Carrie Hearne, Solar Program Manager with DMME who provided an overview of the current policy landscape for solar in SWVA. Carrie's presentation is available [here](#) or by contacting her directly. Key takeaways from Carrie's rich presentation included:

- The current solar policy landscape took off with the 2018 Grid Transformation and Security Act, followed by Governor Northam's Executive Order 43 announced at the inaugural Clean Energy Summit in September 2019. This committed Virginia to producing 100% of its energy from carbon-free sources by 2050 and established concrete goals around energy equity through workforce development.
- During the last General Assembly, the Virginia Clean Economy Act (VCEA) was passed and a whole suite of other bills that set the renewable energy landscape for Virginia.
- The three biggest takeaways from the VCEA are:
 - The establishment of a mandatory renewable portfolio standard (RPS), where Dominion Energy must hit 100% by 2045 and Appalachian Power by 2050.
 - The establishment of a mandatory energy efficiency resource standard (EERS), that is the percentage of the reduction through energy efficiency measures that must be met by 2025.
 - Sets a target of 16,100 MW of solar and onshore wind, 5,200 MW of offshore wind, and 2,700 MW of energy storage in the public interest.
- The VCEA also shifts the regulatory landscape in several important ways, by requiring the State Corporation Commission (SCC) to consider the social cost of carbon in any new applications to construct generating facilities. The SCC must also ensure that the development of new energy resources does not disproportionately impact historically economically disadvantaged communities (HEDCs), which includes the coalfield

region. The VCEA also establishes a Percentage of Income Payment Program (PIPP) for low-income households to provide an alternative payment structure.

- Carrie noted that all of these initiatives are currently under development and conversations are happening at all impacted agencies and offices.
- There are a number of bills that are very important for localities to be aware of to be able to best position themselves to negotiate with solar developers interested in utility scale projects, particularly regarding siting agreements for opportunity zones, revenue share options as an alternative to property tax, etc.
- Carrie also emphasized the significant opportunities for developing utility scale solar on brownfields and previously developed lands, given that Dominion must procure at least 200 MW of solar sited on these land types.
- For Distributed Generation Solar, an important change in policy has been the net metering cap increase from 1% to 6% system-wide. This would apply to co-ops, municipal utilities, and any investor-owned utility companies across the state. Also, 1% of the net metering cap must be reserved for low-income projects.
- Also important for distributed solar, is the third party Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs) capacities, which were raised through the VCEA for Dominion and APCO.
- Under the VCEA, low income customers now qualify for third party PPAs that are sized less than 50 kilowatts which was the previous minimum.
- Shared solar is the same as community solar or virtual net metering. In SWVA, Old Dominion Power territories are now within the region and there may be a multi-family shared solar program. In Dominion territory, a shared solar program will be created for all customers. However, there are currently no possibilities for shared solar in APCO territory or non multi-family programs within Old Dominion Power.
- Virginia is also the first state in the South to join the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI). This means there will be proceeds coming to the Department of Housing and Community Development to be invested into low income affordable housing for energy efficiency.
- In terms of energy storage, the targets are 3,100 MW by 2035 in APCO territory.
- Virginia has also established the Clean Energy Advisory Board, which was expanded in 2020, and has a mandate to help set up a solar loan and rebate fund.
- More details about changes to net metering and other important solar policy changes are detailed in the presentation [slides](#).

After Carrie's in-depth presentation, Chelsea Barnes with Appalachian Voices provided a brief overview of the Workgroup's updated policy goal (Goal 4) to "Promote policy changes that will help grow the solar industry and energy storage industry in Southwest Virginia," and associated action strategies. The goal was updated by the Workgroup Planning Team, incorporating input received from Workgroup members at the June Solar Workgroup meeting.

The current set of action strategies under Goal 4 include:

- A. **Expand community solar**, which is the development of solar energy projects for multiple customers, often off-site from where the customers take electricity service. This expands solar access to more people.
- B. **Expand access to Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs)**, which allow customers to finance solar facilities through third-parties and can make solar accessible to many more people. Virginia utilities have arbitrary limits on the amount of solar facilities that can be financed through PPAs in the state.
- C. **Fund solar-energy focused state boards to facilitate solar energy and energy storage research and installations**, including the Clean Energy Advisory Board, to fund solar installations for low-income customers, the Virginia Solar Energy Development and Energy Storage Authority and the Southwest Virginia Energy Research and Development Authority.
- D. **Increase access to tax incentives and innovative financing tools** to provide investment based incentives for solar.
- E. **Encourage energy storage technologies in Southwest Virginia.**
- F. **Incentivize solar projects on brownfields** and pass the Brightfields Act.
- G. **Remove restrictions on net metering**, which has been instrumental in making solar financially viable for residential and commercial customers in many states, such as removing limits on non-jurisdictional customers and meter aggregation. Meter aggregation allows for multi-family housing developments and certain local government projects to go solar.

A PDF version of all of the Workgroup's goals and action strategies is available to view and download [here](#). Chelsea noted that the major change to the policy action strategies above was the addition of Action Strategy F focused on incentivizing solar projects on brownfields and passing the relevant Brightfields Act. The Workgroup is now also encouraging all energy storage technologies, including battery storage, in SWVA as the state moves in this direction. Lastly, Action Strategy C was updated to include the recently added energy-related state boards, the Clean Energy Advisory Board and the Southwest Virginia Energy Research and Development Authority, both of which were created in 2019.

Chelsea thanked everyone who participated in last year's General Assembly session and shared that the Workgroup's efforts to advance solar policy in 2020 were incredibly effective, particularly with the support of many Workgroup members who took individual action.

Specific successes included:

- 61 local governments, organizations and individuals signed on in support of the Workgroup's policy priorities last year.
- Hundreds of emails were sent.
- At least five letters to the editor were published in local newspapers.
- More than four in-person meetings with legislators and Workgroup members.

- Visits to Richmond to speak at committee hearings.
- Dickenson County, Tazewell County, and Wise County School Boards have already passed resolutions to support fair access to solar for schools. This relates to net metering and other financing barriers that they are still facing.

Chelsea offered a thank you to all Workgroup members who contributed to our shared success and who continue to be the backbone of the Workgroup and its progress in the SWVA region!

Chelsea noted that the Workgroup still has significant work to do on solar policy in 2021, particularly regarding meter aggregation and virtual net metering to ensure that there are mechanisms to allow renters to benefit from energy savings that occur as a result of a multi-family building owner installing solar. There are still non-jurisdictional or government customers who are unable to access net metering and PPAs and financing options need to be expanded to increase solar in the region more broadly. Also, as Carrie mentioned, shared solar programs are still restricted and will ideally be expanded to other power company territories. To review all of the Workgroup’s policy priorities for the 2021 General Assembly, please see the updated policy platform available [here](#).

Large Group Discussion on the Solar Workgroup’s Policy Priorities

With a shared understanding of the current solar policy landscape in SWVA and an update on the Workgroup’s legislative progress in 2020, meeting participants were invited to respond to several questions around policy by adding their comments and ideas to Jamboard, available at this [link](#). Screenshots of comments are also included in the Appendix A of this meeting summary below. The questions and meeting participants’ responses included:

- ***Did you engage the Solar Workgroup around policy last year (write a letter, sign on)?***
 - “Yes, lobbying for solar policy!”
 - “DMME engages on policy through our agency’s policy team.”
 - “Yes, I wrote a letter and submitted a few emails.”
 - “I have written letters to my rep.”
 - “Yes, the NRV Sierra Group organized two solar forums, one on new laws and what they mean for SW VA, the other focusing on the tariff being negotiated between APCO and local governments. We also worked on...”
 - “Support through MDV SEIA.”
 - “DMME directly engaged with the workgroup on several of the Solar Workgroup’s policy priorities.”
 - “I am working with the VA Sierra Club to pivot towards equity issues in minority communities.”
 - “Yes, wrote a letter asking for support of solar policies.”

- ***If not, why (did you not hear about it, not feel comfortable, not know enough, etc.)?***
 - “I have been too busy!”
 - “My voice I’m sure is so small.”
- ***How would you be interested in engaging in policy this year? What are the best ways to communicate with you about how to get involved?***
 - “Yes- I’m registered to lobby this year.”
 - “I want to help on some policy- not sure which.”
 - “Will be focusing on implementation!”
- ***How can we get more support for a Brightfields Bill? Who are the people who would benefit from and support this bill and how can we get them involved (speaking, writing letters, op eds, etc)?***
 - “Demonstrate the opportunity on a technical level showing how many acres are prime sites suitable for utility scale solar.”
 - “Identify the number of or a map of potential brownfields to show how prevalent they are.”
 - “Calculate economic benefits to the region through this effort.”
 - “Communities with unreclaimed mine sites or brownfields will benefit from more funding to support clean up of lands and new economic development.”
 - “Groups like MDV-SEIA would support this bill.”
 - “Outside of the previously mined land, which agency at the state-level might be currently capable of comprehensive mapping brownfields?”

Questions and Discussion

- In response to the comments by meeting participants added to Jamboard, Carrie emphasized that “no voice is too small!”
- Chelsea added that during last year’s General Assembly, legislators clearly expressed interest in what their constituents had to say and in meetings would flip directly to the petition with a list of 61 names from their districts. Legislators’ aides also have to compile every single phone call, letter, and comment and so while one voice might not make a difference on its own, when combined with others it does and may even be the voice that pushes someone over the edge for a decision on a particular issue.
- One participant noted that they had heard that The Nature Conservancy (TNC) had acquired lands in SWVA for solar development. Is this part of the Workgroup?
 - Chelsea shared that TNC has procured a lot of land in the region, but it is not exclusively for the purpose of solar development. Land acquisition is central to their long term conservation efforts in the Appalachian region. TNC is looking at solar development on previously mined lands that cannot be reforested.
 - Adam added via chat that TNC’s Cumberland Forest project encompasses 250,000 acres of land across three states.
 - Christine added that Brad Kreps with TNC is a member of the Workgroup, but

- the effort Chelsea and Adam described is not a Workgroup project.
- TNC is trying to prove that you can do conservation and invest in renewable energy in tandem by developing solar on previously mined lands. This would also drive the need for a larger skilled workforce. Their first priority is proving it is possible and they are currently in the process of identifying a partner now.
 - One participant asked if the Workgroup involves retraining miners for employment opportunities?
 - Adam responded that the direct answer is no. The Workgroup's approach is not to pit solar against coal. Since SWVA has always been an energy producing region, they approach solar as one way to have energy security and economic opportunity. Yet, the Workgroup also recognizes the tremendous need to create new economic opportunities in light of the declining coal economy.
 - Nick added that while creating new economic opportunities for miners is not a direct goal, it is an indirect desired outcome.
 - Chelsea added that the Brightfields Bill passed the House Commerce and Labor Committee but got stuck in the Finance Committee since how it would be funded had not all been worked out. The goal this year is to pass the Brightfields Bill so that it can be funded in the future.
 - In response to the comments around brownfields, Meade Anderson with DEQ shared that the total number of smaller brownfield sites are hard to quantify since there is no overarching registry. DMME may be able to give the most accurate number.
 - Nick with DMME added that their agency does have a good sense of the total number of mined land sites, which are 100,000+ acres, in the state. This list does not include all brownfield sites. Nick also noted that there are a number of things that go into determining whether a particular site would be appropriate for utility scale solar PV in SWVA, but also throughout the state. In the last 18 months, that interest has grown significantly. In 2016, only a few people came to DMME for help with this, but with growing interest, they have since developed a formal process. Now Dominion Energy is even issuing an RFP on development on minelands. At the local level it would help if they could work to identify whether its the IDA or EDA, and who there should be watching RFPs being released by utilities so that they will be able to participate.

To conclude the large group discussion, Chelsea shared that there are a number of ways for Workgroup members and partners to get involved in advancing solar policy. This includes writing emails or hand-written letters to representatives, writing letters to the editor in local papers, making phone calls during the General Assembly session when someone on staff is monitoring how many calls are coming in around a particular bill, or participating in in-person lobby meetings. Chelsea noted that with COVID, lobbying has all been taking place remotely, but usually Workgroup members have the opportunity to have meetings locally with their representatives before they go to Richmond for the General Assembly. Workgroup members

can also sign on to the Workgroup's 2021 legislative priorities through this [form](#).

Small Group Discussions on Solar in Southwest Virginia

After the policy discussion, Workgroup members broke into small groups to focus on several key questions, which are below. Christine provided a brief overview of how breakout sessions work in Zoom and shared that all meeting participants would be randomly assigned a small group to discuss several broader questions for 20-25 minutes with 2-3 other members of the Workgroup. One member of each group should volunteer to help facilitate the conversation and another member should take notes in the google doc shared for reporting back to the group. Adam Wells with Appalachian Voices introduced the specific questions for discussion and shared that the purpose of this exercise is to zoom out beyond the specific policy priorities and get broader Workgroup members' perspective on the region's solar landscape. Questions discussed in small groups included:

- *What has shifted in the solar landscape recently? Where are you seeing the most progress/new opportunity?*
- *What barriers remain to solar? From your perspective, is the Workgroup adequately addressing them?*
- *As the workgroup looks to 2021, how can we continue to effectively engage with the community in SWVA?*
- (Optional question): *Are there any additional reflections/questions from the policy discussion? Particularly from folks who haven't weighed in? Are there any key gaps that you see in the policy plan?*

Highlights from Small Groups and Discussion

After returning to the main Zoom room from break out sessions, a representative from each of the small groups was asked to share top highlights and takeaways from their conversation. Detailed notes taken by each small group are available [here](#) and in Appendix B. Key points included:

Group 1

- Community solar projects would be very beneficial.
- A major barrier is that Old Dominion Power is so often left out of policy conversations, but serves such a significant portion of the SWVA region.
- The continued decline of the population/customer base in SWVA is often claimed as the reason why energy providers don't need to invest in building solar.
- It is important to make energy providers realize they need to be part of the solution to bring more people to the region by working on economic development through solar which would also be good for their business.

Group 2

- Education creates an opportunity to promote solar.
- There is a need to focus on larger projects and how they will work within communities, including moving them forward through permitting and reclamation on abandoned mine land (AML) properties.

Group 3

- Group members had many good ideas for opportunities and potential barriers.
- Participants observed that peoples' thinking around solar and renewable energy seems to be evolving the region. It is starting to be less a liberal vs. conservative issue and it is important to try to make it less politicized.
- Regarding community engagement, there was a suggestion to consider how to best collaborate with universities, colleges, and high schools in the region.
- Perhaps it is possible to pilot a net zero house or small business to create a case study or model of how these technologies can help create the future and illustrate the advantages of renewable energy.
- Engaging youth is super crucial; there is an opportunity to teach kids about renewable energy when solar is put on their schools.
- There was support for putting together a youth forum or design thinking workshop that engaged youth around renewables, including around how they see their future/use in their communities.
- When the Workgroup has events, consider having form letters or postcards to fill out and edit to send to leaders. This is an opportunity to communicate to leaders at various levels about why diverse Workgroup members support solar for SWVA.

Goal 4- *Participants had to leave early, so no report out was shared.*

Goal 5

- One idea discussed was around forming a Sierra Club chapter for SWVA. One group member was representing the New River Valley Sierra Club group and shared that the larger state chapter would like to see more representation and engagement in the region. His recommendation is that the best option is to create a chapter from among solar advocates engaged in the Workgroup and noted that the Sierra Club has a lot of resources and political connections.
- After the meeting ended, a few Workgroup members stayed on to discuss this idea. Rick Shingles with the NRV Sierra Club Group will follow-up with Kathy Selvage and Sierra Club Virginia Chapter staff about this.

Next Steps and Reminders

Participants were thanked for their valuable contributions to the meeting and discussion around the Workgroup's policy priorities for 2021. Workgroup Planning Team members will compile and review the feedback shared by meeting participants and will use it to inform, update, and refine the Workgroup's policy priority platform for 2021. The Workgroup will be

following up with a meeting summary of the meeting through the Workgroup's Mailchimp distribution list. To sign up, please do so through the Solar Workgroup of Southwest Virginia's website: www.swvasolar.org. To engage more specifically around policy, participants were encouraged to indicate their interest in the goals and priority [survey](#) or by contacting a member of the Planning Team directly. All members were also encouraged to sign on to the Workgroup's 2021 legislative priorities through this google [form](#). Finally, Christine shared an evaluation linked [here](#) that participants were asked to complete and share their feedback on how the online meeting went and could be improved for the future.

Meeting Participants

1. Meade Anderson, Virginia Department of Environmental Quality
2. Betsy Arlen, Sun Tribe Solar
3. Jim Baldwin, Cumberland Plateau Planning District Commission
4. Chelsea Barnes, Appalachian Voices
5. Jim Bernard, Brownfield and Energy Consulting
6. Beth Bingman, Making Connections News, Dungannon
7. Stan Botts
8. Austin Counts, Appalachian Voices
9. Edward Davis, Emory and Henry College
10. Nicole Duimstra, Secure Futures Solar
11. Tom Gilardi, Totemic Business Solutions
12. Joe Godsey, Southwest Virginia Community College
13. Tauna Gulley, University of Pikeville
14. Mike Hatfield, Wise County, VA
15. Carrie Hearne, Department of Mines, Minerals, and Energy
16. Vince Maiden, Virginia Department of Environmental Quality
17. Clyde Marshall, community member
18. Ryan McAllister, Secure Futures Solar
19. Josh Mitri, community member
20. Vivek Shinde Patil
21. Charlie Perkins, Cumberland Plateau Planning District Commission
22. David Peterson, Solar Hands-On Instructional Network of Excellence (SHINE)
23. Nick Polier, Department of Mines, Minerals, and Energy
24. Ted Redmond, paleBluedot
25. Kathy Selvage, community member of Wise County, VA
26. Rick Shingles, Sierra Club New River Valley Group
27. Skip Skinner, Lonesome Pine Solar
28. Tony Smith, Secure Futures Solar
29. Dennis Sturdavant
30. Natalie Vaughan
31. Adam Wells, Appalachian Voices
32. Annabel White, Eastman Chemical Company
33. Laura, teacher in North Dakota
34. Christine Gyovai, Dialogue + Design Associates (facilitator)
35. Sierra Gladfelter, Dialogue + Design Associates (facilitator)

Appendix A. Meeting Participant Comments in Jamboard

Did you engage the Solar Workgroup around policy last year (write a letter, sign on)?

Yes, lobbying for solar policy!

DMME engages on policy through our agency's policy team

Yes, I wrote a letter and submitted a few emails.

I have written letters to my rep

Yes. The NRV Sierra Group organized two solar forums, one on new laws and what they mean for SW VA, the other focusing on the tariff being negotiated between APCO and local governments. We also worked on

Support through MDV SEIA

DMME directly engaged with the workgroup on several of the Solar Work Group's policy priorities

I am working with the VA Sierra Club to pivot towards equity issues in minority communities.

If not, why (did you not hear about it, not feel comfortable, not know enough, etc.)?

I have been too busy!

my voice I'm sure is so small

Yes, wrote a letter asking for support of solar policies

How would you be interested in engaging in policy this year? What are the best ways to communicate with you about how to get involved?

Yes - I'm registered to lobby this year.

I want to help on some policy - not sure which

Will be focusing on implementation!

How can we get more support for a Brightfields Bill? Who are the people who would benefit from and support this bill and how can we get them involved (speaking, writing letters, op eds, etc)?

Demonstrate the opportunity on a technical level showing how many acres are prime sites suitable for utility scale solar

communities with unreclaimed mine sites or brownfields will benefit from more funding to support clean up of lands and new economic development

Identifying the number of or a map of potential brownfields to show how prevalent they are.

Groups like MDV-SEIA would support this bill

Calculate economic benefits to the region through this effort

Outside of the previously mined land, which agency at the state-level might be currently capable of comprehensive mapping brownfields?

Appendix B. Notes from Small Group Discussions

Breakout Group 1

Participants: Chelsea Barnes, Nick Polier, Kathy Selvage

Discussion notes:

There is a light shining on SWVA, people are starting to realize there's an opportunity.

Other parts of Virginia are pushing back

Market the region as solar friendly - our local governments

ODP not included in a lot of the policies - there's a lot of education needed

Barriers - ODP, APCo still block solar

Declining customer base in SWVA, economics make it tough for them to bring on solar,

Utilities need to hear from their customers that they want these changes

Engage the community - survey ODP outreach, have real #s for how many people are interested in opting into alternative renewable energy,

You cannot try to convince people to go solar if it's just going to increase their bill. It's not that people don't want to pay for it, it's that they really can't afford it.

Look at community centers, identify someone in each of those communities, have a community meeting, "some people don't have a good opinion of government"

Community solar focus for community meetings. Free food.

Solar projects on churches - concentrated media effort around building solar

Make pamphlets to distribute in communities - not tons of information

A lot of education is needed, we need to bring people along

Community solar project - collective farm,

We need to show people how it works

Breakout Group 2

Participants: Adam Wells (AV), Carrie Hearne (DMME), Betsy Arlen (Suntribe Development), Jim Bernard (Brownfield consulting)

Discussion notes:

- Betsy- Work that's happening through DMME and SolSmart has been very helpful. From the development perspective, this is a great benefit knowing that there are collaborators out there to support the work that developers are doing.
 - Great to see developers coming into the state
 - Passage of VCEA has really accelerated the pace of development
 - Looking at AML properties- knowing that there are groups like AV and DMME out there to support are really helpful.
- Jim asked about the Mineral Gap Data Center-
 - 3MW system in Wise County that will begin construction in summer 2021
- Carrie: In terms of the permit requirement, is that clear to developers?
 - Betsy- yes, very clear- Permit By Rule. Doing a project elsewhere in VA, working through this issue is very much a part of that.
 - With AML sites, the reclamation processes sequencing is really important- want to continue to explore how a solar development community can partner with DMME to better support beneficial use of post-mined land.
 - Jim- clarification that this includes both local and state permit - through Section 130 from DEQ
- Adam: What can we learn from TNC's work to do solar on mineland?
 - Carrie- unique situation where TNC is the landowner reaching out to the solar industry. In a way this flips the typical order of operation on its head
 - TNC has also added multiple non-solar goals on their development- workforce development, economic development, conservation and restoration
 - There could be a lot that localities could learn from this process
 - Betsy- TNC as a landowner represents a different model- typically mine land owners are seeking to complete reclamation and retrieve bonds.
 - A next step could be for development community to work with agency and localities to show how development on mineland could be accomplished
 - Jim- Huge learning curve, lots of terms and jargon, lots of players. Education on what are different ngo's are doing would be very helpful to the development community that is looking for project locations.

- Carrie- Plug for Large Scale Solar Playbook. Could be helpful to include a sidebar case study in the playblook that pulls lessons learned from the TNC effort.
 - May want to also include a more detailed glossary

Breakout Group 3

Participants: Ted Redmond, Josh Mitri, Meade Anderson, Natalie Vaughan for second half

Discussion notes:

Most opportunity:

Infrared Solar Capture - JMU Physics (James Madison University). Potential future use in the area as it enables night time solar energy generation. Potentially also manufacture?

Seeing an increase in diversity in the area.

Seeing a bigger tent - more people are seeing that coal production is in the decline and beginning to recognize the potential that solar offers. There seems to be political will from both political parties. Interests are varied perhaps from job creation and improved tax revenue to improved environmental potential.

Barriers:

Technology limitations - for instance we are getting only like 10% of the light energy to convert to electricity. There have been improvements but nothing significant

Policy barriers - we need to continue to create more synergy and then ultimately economics will take over

Grid conditions - can the grid handle the solar generation? Likely will have significant challenges and need for grid upgrades in order enable larger solar installations. Need to start dialogue with utilities

Ideology - there are still folks who just don't want solar because they see it is "left wing" and they don't want to be perceived as left wing.

There are opportunities to clarify that solar is not political but economical - make the case on the economics.

Engaging with Community:

Make the case for solar as an economic, job creation opportunity (offset the “left wing” idea).

Make the case on how public entities like schools and municipalities can offset costs. Create case studies.

Help people understand their individual home or business use-case and provide example ROI for different property types (small house, larger house, small business, larger business, public sectors, etc)

Secure Futures has curricula that helps teach students - how can we expand on engagement with the youth? Classroom curricula, youth forum, youth design thinking workshop centered around solar opportunities and renewable energy, etc? Engage thinking about “the house of the future” or “the southwest VA energy of the future” **Cool Idea** - hold a youth engagement design thinking workshop to generate ideas and discussion around renewable energy opportunities in the area (and perhaps net zero? - example:

<https://palebluedot.llc/dubuque-youth-power/2020/2/15/youth-climate-action-workshop>)

Cool idea: Potential for teaming with college and/or high schools and/or municipalities and do an example Net Zero house or Net Zero business as a pilot project case study. This could also be a modular type building and perhaps a SIPS manufacturing company could be engaged as well.

Cool idea: with all events include the opportunity to write a letter to senators or other community leaders - always have a form available that participants can use to send to elected officials about why they support solar or why they want them to “get on board with solar”. At all events have a draft note card or letter that people can use to draft a letter to their elected officials. Could even be a link to a webpage that has a search for them to find their elected officials and a suggested / potential starting place for the letter.

Breakout Group 4

Participants: Joe Godsey, Natalie Vaughan, Stan Botts

Just started the new alternative energy program in January but then covid hit. Launched first class in august, hasn't been able to see results yet.

People still think it is going against what is local. Outdated misconceptions.

More internship programs, more outreach and training, even at the earliest levels of education. Even when students learn about it they can promote it to their parents.

Natalie just started her new position as Marketing Coordinator at Secure Futures this week, and does not have an extensive background in solar energy or this field.

Joe Godsey had to leave for another meeting at 1:00.

Natalie moved to Room 3 at this point.

Breakout Group 5

Participants: Austin Counts, Nicole Duimstra, Rick Shingles, Sierra Gladfelter

Discussion notes:

- **Policy Discussion**
 - Nicole is on the policy team for the Solar Workgroup; addressing everything needed to move projects forward and covering all the gaps

- **How to effectively engage the community in SWVA (esp. within context of COVID)?**
 - Austin recommended that this is an important place to start.
 - Nicole is working on scheduling and doing outreach around solar webinars in the coming weeks.
 - Solar Workgroup has a good list of contacts, through schools, healthcare facilities, housing authority groups, gyms, churches, etc. but reaching people and prospects for going solar continues to be a challenge.
 - Another group to be in contact with are those individuals/groups/companies that have already gone solar.
 - Right now Austin is trying to work with a small grassroots group (unofficial) of residential folks that has gone solar.
 - Iron Works Cycling, etc. (additional places on Austin's list)
 - Nicole is interested in getting in touch with specific individuals who are interested in putting solar on their roof or can refer others, be advocates and share their experiences.
 - These individuals are also able to speak directly about their experience BOTH to their neighbors and community members as well as within the context of lobbying and speaking to legislators during GA, etc.
 - Re: three schools that passed solar resolutions, almost all members of the informal group wrote letters to their school board.

- **Sierra Club chapter outreach and engagement in Southwest Virginia**

- Rick's recent initiative through the Sierra Club New River Valley group has been working in collaboration with other enviro groups through the New River Valley Climate Collaboration- to develop plan at each government level (counties, towns, to work collectively on plan) under Hazard Mitigation Plan- goal to develop conversation and dialogue and reach out to the Regional Commission- the negotiation got postponed to first of year because of COVID. This initiative began in 2018/2019.
- The Commission provides many services to local governments, so has to play a role in connecting local governments.
- The second initiative is to educate ApCo consumers in the New River Valley area and how GA outcomes will impact the local region.
- The people negotiating the contracts between ApCo and local governments could bring their experiences to the table. Appalachian Voices also participated as well as local delegates to GA. This forced them to finally share what they are talking about.
- Rick noted that he is often asked about what is happening further SW Virginia because there is no active Sierra Club chapter in SW VA but there is no organization west of them. Rick's group does not have the capacity to coordinate more broadly regionally.
- Rick is interested in networking and building contacts for a future SW VA Sierra Club Chapter. Capacity is a challenge as the local group has also atrophied a bit. It's unrealistic for the New River Valley Sierra Club group to be able to do outreach and engage in this vast region of the state. There is a knowledge and contact gap.
- Rick noted that the national Sierra Club and the Virginia Chapter of the Sierra Club have made a commitment to investing in solar and renewable energy. There are unbelievable resources associated with the Sierra Club as an organization, not only money
- Rick would like to suggest to the state Sierra Club that members of the Solar Workgroup could comprise a SW chapter; also for the current New River Valley Sierra Club Group to engage in further SW regionally in the meantime
- apter. Austin noted that the Solar Workgroup has had some engagement with the Sierra Club more broadly.
- Appalachian Voices may be able to visit this and potential support coordination?

Barriers

- ApCo is one of the most challenging utilities to work with, thus their most recent webinar.