

ROLL CALL

Vicki Andrews	Michael Karafin
Harry Baumgartner, Jr.	Geoff Lance
Tyson Brooks	Tim Rohr
Rick Elwell	John Schuhmacher
Jarrold Hahn	Melissa Woodworth
Bill Horan	

Michael Lautzenheiser, Jr., Director
 Tim Sipe, Attorney

On October 14, 2025, Tyson Brooks called the special meeting of the Area Plan Commission to order at 7:26 pm, and all members were present for a roll call. The meeting started late due to streaming issues.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

No minutes were presented for approval. Both the October 2nd meeting and this special meeting will be reviewed at the upcoming November 6th meeting.

OLD ITEMS:

No old items were discussed.

NEW ITEMS:

No new items were discussed.

OTHER BUSINESS:

Review of Proposed Solar Ordinance Amendment Drafts

Michael Lautzenheiser gave a recap of the Indiana Code, which prohibits a community from imposing a ban for more than a year. He went over the changes that were drafted since the last meeting. Tyson Brooks mentioned that we can not break the law before opening the floor to the public for comment.

Brandon Harnish, with Wells County Council, opened the public comment portion of the meeting. He also referred to a document with 50 individuals' signatures, agreeing that he was speaking on their behalf. He mentioned property rights and said that, as well, we need to keep the decisions local and not allow the state to decide for us. He asked for a setback of 2000 feet from all non-participating properties. Mr. Harnish said that even with the economic agreement in place, it doesn't mean that the project will happen. He ended with the county needs to decide what belongs here and what doesn't. Dan Straka said he had a very different viewpoint, calling a 2000 ft setback a joke and even the 800 ft setback mentioned in the draft too much. He said the county needs to make its own decision and not follow what surrounding counties do, and encouraged the board to listen to landowners who want to use their land for solar and to keep Wells County open for business. Ben Herman asked a few questions about acreage and wattage, buffers, and medium vs. large-scale projects. Rick Jonloz deferred speaking at this time when he was called for comment. Cheryl Peters said that the proposed 800 ft setback seemed too much and suggested 400 ft. Polly Wymer & Fredrick Wymer said they wanted to be here to be heard. They referred to the Allen County setback and asked the board to consider the 2000 ft setback Mr. Harnish proposed. They turned in a petition with 952 signatures opposing solar. They asked

about the solar company having a meeting across the hall before this meeting, whether they rented the room, and about Wells County taxes. Darwin Garbie spoke on property rights and the right to keep a view without solar. He said that the majority here was opposed to solar and that by not installing solar, we would protect the farmers' rights and be good stewards. He talked about the federal government not wanting solar and that we need to listen to the people. David Deuter discussed CO2 and its benefits to plants, and said we don't need wind or solar. Brooke Cushing noted that she agreed with Brandon Harnish. She mentioned subsidies and tax breaks, and said that if it's not your dirt, it's not your right. She also talked about the hunters and how animal migration patterns will be affected, as we will see more deer on the roads. Rex Drenned said that every year Wells County loses ground to urban development, and that it's not letting more go to industry. He said it's just greedy landowners wanting more. Kevin Jackson said he was one of the greedy landowners and that this would help keep southern Wells County alive. He asked why change the ordinance now and talked about the proposed setbacks matching those of a CFO, when solar doesn't produce the noise or smell a CFO does. He asked how many have actually been to a solar farm. He asked the board not to shut this down as they did with the wind. Mr. Jackson said that we won't run out of food or crops.

Tyson Brooks addressed the crowd, saying they don't need to boo comments and to be respectful.

Jerry Baker read the letter that he emailed to the office on behalf of Grover Farm Trust. He asked the board to allow Paddlefish to move forward with their project. Bill Cushing thanked the board for taking the time to listen to everyone. He said that the county is already divided and that we need to do what's best for everyone. Taby Fate asked that the setbacks be from non-participating property lines, not from non-participating homes. She wondered why the non-participating property owners couldn't have rights, too. Megan Dunham said that she fully agreed with Brandon Harnish. She talked about contaminated crops and crop insurance. She mentioned that opposition to solar began when everyone became informed about the leases and projects. She said that Wells County is beautiful and that we shouldn't ruin its beauty with panels. Jonathan Benter said he designed and installed solar on his own property. He asked that the county stay open to responsible solar. He talked about the IN General Assembly and the known power supply issues going forward. He said that the state will step in and take local control away if there are enough de facto bans in place. Michell Bowman agreed with Mr. Harnish. She felt that 50 acres was excessive and suggested two classifications, small and large. She asked about agreements in place. She voiced concern that the farm ground would not return to normal if these were installed. She also mentioned lawsuits against neighbors, flooding concerns, and toxic pollutants from solar panels. She said that solar companies will say anything to get the project approved, and we need to protect future family building on family land.

David Bowman passed when called on to speak. Robert Johnson said he supported Brandon Harnish when asked to speak. Gregory Witkamp was not present when asked to speak. Lori Bender thanked the board for having a community meeting. She said that Indiana is in favor of data centers, and those are what it needs to increase power. She noted that solar is clean energy and that, with the large transmission lines in the area, the need for energy has long existed. She explained that the large electrical towers help keep the power on for all of us. Claudia Mounsey said that we need to help ag thrive and co-exist with solar. She referenced the PJM grid and said that solar is faster to install than any other option. Christine Furnish told a story about the no-solar signs and her granddaughter, and how even she knew, as a young child, that farm ground would be lost. She said that agriculture shouldn't be replaced by industry. She talked about the bullying tactics used by the pro-solar group and said this is our county, and we need to fight for

what we want. She asked what happens when the money runs out and how this company isn't American-owned. She said to let the prices keep going up; she didn't want solar. Zane Gaerheart said we need to review and reevaluate how we notify the public. He said that we are an uninformed community as a whole, and everyone needs to be informed. He said solar isn't sustainable without subsidies. He asked if we were willing to let them experiment on us. He referred to the job creation mentioned earlier in the meeting and said it's temporary, not long-term. Donna Waters expressed concern about decommissioning and the lack of landfills accepting panels. She said that one day we are going to wish we had the farm ground. The public comment portion of the meeting was closed.

There was a brief break in the meeting, and it resumed at 9:30 pm.

Tyson Brooks reviewed the items from the public comment portion of the meeting. The board discussed adding wattage to the acreage requirements and height restrictions. They also discussed buffering, foliage spacing, erosion control, and continued maintenance of the buffer. The board discussed changing the solar company's ownership and how the next company would have to follow the same regulations. There were additional discussions on buffering and setbacks. The board discussed the Indiana Code and whether, if the intent were there, it is unclear in some of the board members' opinions. Michael Lautzenheiser discussed the Planning Enabling Act from the US Supreme Court. Tim Sipe mentioned that the state sets the ground rules; the county can make it more restrictive, but not less restrictive. Michael Karafin asked how the other counties arrived at their setbacks and what motivated them. Geoff Lance asked how far away is ok. More discussion was had on setbacks. There was a review of options for the next meeting if the board chose to have amendments. The board agreed that the County Commissioners asked them to review the ordinance presented to them, and that, now that the board has reviewed it, we will send our ordinance amendment to the County Commissioners to see what happens. It was suggested, and seemed to have support from the board members, that the amendments include: 1320 ft from a non-participating residence; small solar projects up to 10 acres; large solar projects over 10 acres; development plan requirements; and updated buffer language.


There was no vote at this meeting, and it was recommended that it be considered at the December meeting for a recommendation to be given to the local jurisdictions.

ADVISORY:

The November 6, 2025, meeting of the Wells County Area Plan Commission was confirmed.

ADJOURN:

John Schuhmacher moved to adjourn the meeting, which Vicki Andrews seconded. The motion carried 11-0. The Area Plan Commission special meeting was adjourned on October 14, 2025, at 10:41 pm.



Tyson Brooks, President

ATTEST: 

Michael Lautzenheiser Jr., Secretary