

Vice Chairman Strickland asked if anyone else would like to speak in support of the application. No one spoke. Vice Chairman Strickland asked if anyone would like to speak in opposition of the application. No one spoke. There being no further discussion, Vice Chairman Strickland called for a motion. Mrs. Quarterman made a motion to approve as presented, citing criteria "c." Mrs. Hobby seconded the motion. The motion was called and carried unanimously with a vote of 6 to 0.

Agenda Item # 3: VAR-2019-15 — TBD Solar Project (Wetherington Lane)

Chairman McCall announced the case. Mrs. Tulloch stated that the applicant is requesting a variance to Section 4.07.00 of the ULDC (Lowndes County Unified Land Development Code) as it pertains to general requirements for landscaping, buffers and tree protection. The subject property consists of 274 acres and is located on Wetherington Lane, Valdosta, Georgia, in an E-A (Estate Agricultural) and CON (Conservation) zoning districts. Ryan Sanders, partner of Beltline Energy Company has entered into a land lease agreement with property owner, Mr. Robert C. Wetherington, to establish a solar farm. Beltline Energy will lease 10 to 30 acres. During the initial phase of obtaining the ULDC's regulations to establish this use, Mr. Sanders was advised of the required landscaping and buffer area requirements. Mr. Sanders stated the ULDC regulations would be a hardship to adhere to, as this project requires the energy of the sun as its main source to operate. Beltline Energy is not requesting to forego the requirements in their entirety; they are proposing a vegetative buffer to consist of a single row of 1-gallon evergreen shrubs along the perimeter fence of the solar energy project. As such, the applicants are requesting a variance to Section 4.07.00 of the ULDC as it pertains to the minimum requirements for Landscaping and Buffer Area standards. TRC staff heard and considered this request during their scheduled meetings and unanimously gave support to the developer's request as presented. Likewise, staff is of the opinion that the applicants are attempting to put forth a good faith effort in meeting the county's requirement, as well as, being a friendly neighbor to nearby parcels. To that end, staff believes that the granting of a variance in this case would be in line with the purpose and intent of the ULDC as it pertains to required landscaping and buffer area standards.

Vice Chairman Strickland asked if there were any questions for staff. Mrs. Hobby asked how many linear feet, total, were around the solar field. Mrs. Tulloch stated the applicant could answer that question. Mrs. Hobby expressed a concern about the one-gallon plants that the applicant was proposing in some areas of the project. Mr. Brantley asked about the buffering requirements. Mrs. Tulloch stated that the buffering depends on what zoning is adjacent to the property, and the landscaping numbers were different than the buffering requirements. Mr. Brantley asked if it was triggered by the proposed use. Mrs. Tulloch stated it was.

There being no more questions for staff, Vice Chairman Strickland asked if anyone would like to speak in support of the application. Dan Stevenson, Beltline Energy, 154 Krog Street, Atlanta, spoke in support. Mr. Stevenson stated Beltline Energy had entered into an agreement between Beltline Energy, Georgia Power, and Mr. Wetherington to generate solar energy. Mr. Stevenson stated they were requesting the variance to prevent shade from the shade trees from inhibiting the panels' ability to generate solar energy. They also wanted to utilize evergreen trees around the edges of the property, and utilize a chain link fence. Mr. Stevenson stated there was a concern regarding water running off of the property during construction. Mr. Stevenson stated that silt fences would be utilized during construction and all applicable regulations would be followed during construction. There would also be a decommissioning clause in the contract, to require removal of the equipment at the end of the lease. Mr. Stevenson stated that the sound generated by the panels were about 58 decibels, about the level of a library. Mrs. Hobby asked about the chain link fence, when an opaque fence is required. Mr. Stevenson stated that they wanted to use a chain link fence and evergreens. Mrs. Hobby stated that a chain link fence and one gallon evergreens would not take the place of an opaque fence. Mrs. Hobby asked how many panels they would have. Mr. Stevenson state it could be hundreds, maybe over a thousand, but he would have to get back to ZBOA on that. Mrs. Hobby stated that there were a lot of residences nearby, and she was unsure how many of the adjacent residents would want to see the panels, and asked if they could leave the shade trees to