

Project Area Data

Townships: Liberty & Chester

Petition Acreage: 2,896

Petition Parcels: 49

Homes within 1 Mile: 154

Homes within ¼ Mile: 58

Population within 1 Mile: 374

Land Use Breakdown Table # 1

Land Use Breakdown Within 1-Mile from Paddlefish Site (Before Project)					
Classification	Description	Units	Square Footage	Acreage	Percentage
All	All	1181	503,861,464	11,567.07	100.00%
4	Tillable Land	252	436,366,651	10,017.60	86.60%
6	Woodland	77	19,185,503	440.44	3.81%
91	Excess Residential Acreage	111	13,181,649	302.61	2.62%
82	Public Right-of-Way	322	10,292,764	236.29	2.04%
81	Legal Ditches	99	6,653,624	152.75	1.32%
9	Homesite	159	5,881,952	135.03	1.17%
21	Classified Forest	11	5,426,400	124.57	1.08%
5	Non-Tillable Land	70	3,268,012	75.02	0.65%
85	Railroad	6	2,686,154	61.67	0.53%
71	Other Farmland / Farm Building	40	436,789	10.03	0.09%
72	Other Farmland / Pond	13	191,283	4.39	0.04%
11	Commercial Industrial Primary	5	166,704	3.83	0.03%
83	Public Utility	15	108,905	2.50	0.02%
13	Commercial Industrial - Undeveloped	1	15,074	0.35	0.00%

Land Use Breakdown Table # 2

Land Use Breakdown Within 1-Mile from Paddlefish Site (After Project)					
Classification	Description	Units	Square Footage	Acreage	Percentage
All	All	1181	503,861,464	11,567.07	100.00%
4	Tillable Land	252	359,020,273	8,241.97	71.25%
84	Solar	37	77,346,378	1,775.63	15.35%
6	Woodland	77	19,185,503	440.44	3.81%
91	Excess Residential Acreage	111	13,181,649	302.61	2.62%
82	Public Right-of-Way	322	10,292,764	236.29	2.04%
81	Legal Ditches	99	6,653,624	152.75	1.32%
9	Homesite	159	5,881,952	135.03	1.17%
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Findings

IC 36-7-4-603 Zoning ordinance; preparation and consideration of proposals Sec. 603. In preparing and considering proposals under the 600 series, the plan commission and the legislative body shall pay reasonable regard to:

(1) the comprehensive plan;

The Wells County Vision 2035 Comprehensive Plan states the following things regarding energy and large-scale (utility scale) solar development in our community.

1. The P-1 Power Plant Overlay district is only compatible with the A-1 “Agricultural Intensive”, I-1 “Light Industrial”, I-2 “Heavy Industrial” zoning districts as stated in the Wells County Land Use Compatibility Spectrum and the requirements of the Wells County Zoning Ordinance.
2. Energy in Wells County provides the backbone of our modern way of life.
 - a. *General statement in the energy section of the plan.*
3. We should play an active role in making sure that our community has the needed energy capacity to continue to grow.
 - a. *This statement is focusing on our growing energy demands and our goal to be a pro-growth community when making land use decisions.*
4. A balance between private property rights, what is best for the area, financial opportunities, and neighboring landowner’s interests should be found while discussing energy development in our community.
 - a. *This was a key piece of the discussion when drafting the energy segment of the Wells County Vision 2035 plan. When looking at ordinance amendments and zoning maps changes, we should look at these factors when making a decision.*
5. Currently there is a lack of public support for utility scale solar farms.
 - a. *This statement came from the high amount of survey responses regarding a lack of support for utility scale solar development in our community.*
6. The Solar Project Probability Map shows where a utility scale solar project is more likely to be planned based on proximity to transmission lines. The Solar Siting Guidance Map shows areas where and utility scale solar project is more desirable based on community growth patterns, community projects, and population density.
 - a. *These maps were created to give a data driven analytical viewpoint towards where utility scale solar could be developed in our community looking at proximity to existing transmission lines, population density, and established growth areas. The data comes from the Wells County GIS mapping layers including transmission line layer, address point layer, rural sewer project layer, and city/ town growth boundary layer. The center of the Paddlefish project does fall within the Wells County Solar Project Probability Map’s high probability area. It completely fits within the high and moderate probability areas. The Paddlefish project fits entirely in the lowest population density area on the Wells County Solar Project Siting Guidance Map. The project also falls outside of any growth or rural sewer project area.*
7. Be aware of the risks involved with the potential loss of local control regarding utility scale solar projects that has been discussed recently at the Indiana State House.
 - a. *This issue has been a consistent item brought forth in by the Indiana General Assembly. However, it is not under consideration currently in the 2024 short session. Historically communities that have consistently denied projects or have requirements that make it impossible to site them have been a seen as an obstacle to the State in regard to its ability to reach its goals. Purdue university has been monitoring local ordinance on behalf of the general assembly tracking such issues.*
8. Solar Projects: Prepare for and plan how to regulate, permit, and review potential solar projects.
 - a. *This is a general action statement in the plan stating that we know these projects are being considered in our community and we need to be prepared to work through the process. The regulation process has*

been established in the Wells County Zoning Ordinance and is currently being amended regarding participating property setbacks and underground collection wiring.

9. Our community values its agricultural background and its preservation.
 - a. *It is clear that there will be a significant change in the area from tillable acreage to solar panels, transformers, substations, fencing, and driveways. However, there are still agricultural uses that can occur within and around those improvements. Not all of the lease acreage would be consumed by the development and would remain tillable. Grasslands, grazing opportunities, and pollinator habitat would remain viable options within the actual developed solar panel areas. The approximately 1,776 acres of solar panel development area would transform from traditional row crop tillable use to a combination of energy production and grassland uses. There have been university studies that state the soil benefits of solar development in regard to their ability to regenerate nutrients while they are not actively being used for row crop agriculture.*

(2) current conditions and the character of current structures and uses in each district; This area is currently used and built out as a primarily agricultural area with approximately 154 rural residential units spread out within a mile from the project site. The primary land uses are tillable 86.6%, Woodland 3.81%, Excess Residential Acreage 2.62%, Public Right-of-Ways 2.04%, Legal Ditches 1.32%, Homesite 1.17%, and Classified Forests 1.08% with no other land use exceeding 1% of the area. Altogether open space land uses equal 96.12% of the affected property. The proposed project would be to request to convert approximately 1,776 acres of class 4 tillable acreage to solar development based on the review of the preliminary layout map. This would make it the 2nd highest land use in the area with tillable being 71.25% and solar being 15.35%. To put this project's land use impact in perspective to the total land use of Wells County it would be 0.75% of all of Wells County.

(3) the most desirable use for which the land in each district is adapted; This area is currently used primarily as tillable acreage and other open space uses. The above-mentioned stats clearly show this use. The question of compliance with this section in this case is focused on what the most desirable use for this land long term is? Is the most desirable use to continuation of tillable acreage and other open style uses to be a priority. The Wells County Vision 2035 Comprehensive Plan call for this area to continue to remain A-1 "Agricultural Intensive" zoned, but also shows it as a likely location for utility solar development based on the proximity of transmission lines, low population density, and distance from growth and utility boundaries. The Wells County Vision 2035 Comprehensive Plan does state, "our community values its agricultural background and its preservation." This creates an interesting discussion about whether solar preserves agriculture. There will be a significant change in the area from tillable acreage to solar panels, transformers, substations, fencing, and driveways. However, there are still agricultural uses that can occur within and around those improvements. Not all the lease acreage would be consumed by the development and would remain tillable. Grasslands, grazing opportunities, and pollinator habitat would remain viable options within the actual developed solar panel areas. The approximately 1,776 acres of solar panel development area would transform from traditional row crop tillable use to a combination of energy production and grassland uses. There have been university studies that state the soil benefits of solar development in regard to their ability to regenerate nutrients while they are not actively being used for row crop agriculture.

(4) the conservation of property values throughout the jurisdiction; The goal of review for this section is to determine whether or not this project would or would not cause property values to go down. In this discussion there are 3 primary classes of property that would need to be reviewed.

1. Rural Residential Properties

- a. *There are 154 rural residential properties within 1 mile of the project site. There are 58 rural residential properties within a ¼ mile of the project site. Residential properties are more volatile as it comes to valuation of the classes of property discussed. The current trend in Wells County has seen a consistent rise in residential property values. We have looked at two rural residential properties that had at the time what were considered objectionable uses being developed on a neighboring property. One next to a new agricultural chemical storage facility. The other next to a new stone quarry. The properties despite the objectionable land use continued to increase in value at each sale. The only hiccup was when one property went through bankruptcy which then quickly corrected itself which was before the objectionable use was operating. The extensive report that was presented by Paddlefish Solar Titled "Paddlefish Solar P-1 Property Value Study" states that only solar projects with no required setbacks or screening would*

potentially cause a negative property value impact. This project would be required to meet all setbacks and screening requirements of the Zoning Ordinance and the petitioner is stating that they will be increasing the setback requirement voluntarily.

2. Tillable Acreage Properties

- a. *Tillable acreage properties are primarily going to be used as part of this project. If 1,776 acres of tillable acreage is removed from the market for a considerable period, then it would be natural to determine that the property values of other nearby land would rise in value based on economic supply and demand principles. Do to the larger income opportunity caused by land leases the parcels that are developed as part of the project will have a greater increase in value based on an increase in cash flow. A potential item that could impact property values would be if the project would negatively impact neighboring property drainage, access, or ability to do normal farm operations. These items would be addressed in a fully compliant development plan petition. This would be a unique property impact. If tillable acreage property values decreased in the area it would be more likely based on the farm economy, interest rates, and regional or national trends.*

3. Woodland / Non-Tillable Acreage Properties

- a. *Does changing the neighboring built environment next to a woodland or non-tillable property affect its property value. There are many things that can be built in the A-1 zoning district as it is. The construction of a residence, pole barn, farm buildings, CAFOs, grain bins, farm chemical facilities, stone quarry, fences, and many other things are all ready allowed to be built without the need for a rezoning or establishment of an overlay district. Over time it has been proven that these items do not negatively affect property values as long as they meet the requirements of our local ordinances.*
- b. *A potential item that could impact property values would be if the project would negatively impact neighboring property drainage, access, or ability to do normal operations. These items would be addressed in a fully compliant development plan petition. This would be a unique property impact. If woodland or non-tillable acreage property values decreased in the area it would be more likely based on the economy, interest rates, and regional or national trends.*

(5) responsible development and growth.

For development and growth to be responsible it would need to be done in a way that is answerable and accountable to the other neighboring areas and focus on the future desires for our community. This project area is primarily tillable acreage, non-tillable/woodlands, and rural residential. The project does generally fit the goals and aspirations of the Wells County Vision 2035 Comprehensive Plan as stated in requirement 1. It is located fully within an area that fits the general goals of the plan. There is the statement about lack of public support for utility scale solar in the plan that brings pause in this discussion. Our plan also states that we are generally a pro-growth community. Here are some items to consider in this discussion:

1. Is there a better place in our community for this project?

- a. *To further clarify this point based on the siting maps in the comprehensive plan is this a good spot or does it have conflicts? In the review of the comprehensive plan, it appears to meet the requirements of being a good location for the project if a project like this was to occur in the community.*

2. Do we care about having access to power generated in our own community?

- a. *Energy security has been a growing topic. Local power generation is becoming a greater discussion point around the country. If we have local power generation options here in our community, it does provide a level of protection against power generation issues that may occur at the places we currently get energy from. While projects are usually marketed at being purchased by power company or business the actual energy produced goes onto the same grid that our communities are located on.*

3. Are there winners and losers in this process?

- a. *With all projects there are winners and losers, but to what extent is maybe the better question. There is a loss of tillable acreage so there is less land to farm and less production potential in our community. There is a change to the viewshed in the area from row crops to solar panels. However, in many cases the viewshed change because of ordinance requirements would be changing from row crops to a mixture of row crops, vegetative screening, and other existing natural features. Paddlefish brings up in their petition's findings of fact about the great financial benefits to the township, school, and county. Paddlefish also states that they will maintain some level of grassland or pastureland uses within the project area to keep with the existing crop production uses.*