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A WHITE PAPER · SOLAR POLICY · EASTERN SHORE, MARYLAND

Solar Without Giving Up the Shore

Putting Alternative Locations First in Maryland's Solar Development

Evidence and Options for Eastern Shore Government Leaders

Kate Van Name

Consultant · KVN Partners

Chestertown, Maryland

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Executive summary

Maryland should give relevant, assessed alternatives priority consideration when choosing where solar generation will go, and invest in making suitable rooftops, parking areas, and reuse sites practical to develop. On the Eastern Shore, these decisions reach into the working life of a farm and the future growth of a town. A location can offer a landowner valuable income and an efficient electrical connection while committing ground that a community expects to need for other purposes. Those interests deserve to be considered together, while choices remain open.

The nine Eastern Shore counties host 692.3 megawatts of the 1,387.6 megawatts of operating solar capacity listed statewide in the August 2026 federal inventory, or 49.89%. For context, the Shore accounts for 7.56% of Maryland's July 2025 population, 33.84% of its land area in the 2025 geographic data, and 48.47% of its land in farms in the 2022 agricultural census. [5], [1], [15], [3] The capacity share is therefore close to the farmland share and much larger than the population share. Each comparison describes a different aspect of the region's contribution, and none alone establishes a fair allocation of future projects. The inventory excludes many small systems and does not measure the acreage occupied by panels or the electricity generated over a year. [2]

The regional total also conceals important differences. Queen Anne's, Caroline, Dorchester, and Somerset counties host about 82% of the Shore's listed operating capacity. [5] Cecil, Kent, Talbot, Wicomico, and Worcester counties also face applications or approved projects involving town growth, woodland, neighboring uses, and agricultural land. [60], [6], [58], [64], [59], [65] A regional strategy should reflect those different experiences and give municipalities a direct role. The practical question is how Maryland can prepare a wider range of suitable locations while taking the consequences of each land commitment seriously.

Completed roof, canopy, and landfill projects show that alternative locations can contribute. [8], [9], [10] Their value depends on owner participation, physical suitability, electrical access, cost, and timing. Matching one large field's rated capacity may require many separately owned sites, and equal capacity does not guarantee equal electricity production. Maryland should therefore pair priority consideration with a funded effort to prepare and test alternatives. Its existing public records and siting studies provide a foundation, while the state's approval role makes state participation essential. [70], [23], [11], [12]

Recommendations

Reconcile existing evidence: Extend the operating-capacity comparison into a consistent account of acreage, project status, and change over time, with continuing public access.

Develop county strategies: Bring county and municipal priorities into a local record of approaching decisions, land concerns, practical opportunities, and requested safeguards.

Coordinate the Shore: Agree on shared requests through county and municipal representatives, preserving differences among communities and using an existing forum where practical.

Prepare assessed alternatives: Connect an inventory of suitable, owner-available locations with the public project record, clearly distinguishing possibilities from projects that can proceed.

Fund and test delivery: Use a limited pilot to establish preparation costs, connection requirements, financing needs, and realistic schedules before expanding the program.

Establish lawful review requirements: Give relevant alternatives priority consideration and explain decisions affecting farms or growth land, with rulemaking or legislation where required.

Assign responsibility and report results: Name accountable offices, fund the assigned work, and use published outcomes to decide which projects and policies should advance.

County and municipal representatives should ask the Governor's Office to designate a state convener and bring agencies, legislators, utilities, and technical partners together. The proposed targets are a response within 30 days of receipt, a session within 90 days of acceptance, and a published work plan within 60 days after the session. Local preparation and independent analysis can begin immediately. These are proposed management targets, not existing legal deadlines.

Introduction

What we want to carry forward

A farmer and a fisherman stand beside the shield on Maryland's Great Seal. On the Eastern Shore, the land and water they represent remain part of how communities work, support families, and understand their place in Maryland. They also invite a question about the future: what do we want the decisions we make today to carry forward? [13]

Land is where much of that future takes shape. A farm supports a family and an agricultural business. A field near town may be one of the places where future homes, employers, or public facilities could go. A long commitment of either place can shape decisions well beyond the immediate transaction, including choices that have yet to become urgent. Communities need a way to weigh that future alongside the opportunity in front of them.

Solar belongs in that discussion because its location matters. Panels on a suitable building or above parking can produce electricity alongside an existing use. A field installation makes a different commitment of land. The question is how Maryland weighs those choices and makes other locations workable when a farmland or town-growth proposal comes forward.

Putting alternative locations first means investigating suitable rooftops, parking areas, and reuse sites, then doing the work that allows promising locations to become practical choices. A maintained statewide list would connect that preparation with project review. It would give applicants a practical starting point, so they would not have to discover alternatives from scratch. Relevant, available alternatives would receive priority consideration, and selecting productive farmland or planned growth land would come with an explanation of why those alternatives could not meet the project's needs. [7]

Here, productive farmland means land supporting an agricultural operation, and planned growth land means land identified for future growth in a current adopted plan. A growth designation expresses a community's intention, while water and sewer capacity, service rights, and extension costs help determine when development can proceed. Those conditions belong alongside the plan when a location is considered. [14]

Reuse sites include places where prior use or physical conditions limit conventional development and solar may be suitable, such as certain landfills and brownfields. Their history can create opportunities as well as constraints. Environmental conditions, habitat, drainage, and other obligations still require attention before a site can support a project.

For the leaders and residents of Caroline, Cecil, Dorchester, Kent, Queen Anne's, Somerset, Talbot, Wicomico, and Worcester counties and their municipalities, the task is to bring their contribution and different land priorities into a statewide discussion of specific choices. No one town's experience can stand for them all. That discussion can be firm while respecting a farm family's decision to sell or lease. Private choice and public responsibility both belong in the conversation.

The Shore's share and the land at stake

Compare the contribution and the opportunity

The Shore's contribution comes into clearer view when its nine counties are compared with Maryland's 14 other counties and Baltimore City. The regional total shows the scale of that contribution. County records explain where it is concentrated and what particular locations mean to their communities. Together, they help leaders ask whether Maryland is preparing a sufficiently broad range of places for solar development.

The federal inventory reports the rated size of operating equipment in megawatts (MW), covering plants with at least 1 MW of combined capacity and excluding many smaller systems. These are preliminary monthly figures. Capacity tells us the size of the equipment, while generation tells us how much electricity it produces over time. The table compares the Shore's share of listed capacity with its shares of people, land, farms, and mapped developed surfaces. Each row is a separate comparison with its own observation date. [5], [2]

Measure	Eastern Shore share	Rest of Maryland share	Observation period
Population	7.56%	92.44%	July 2025 estimates
Land area, excluding water	33.84%	66.16%	2025 Gazetteer
Land in farms	48.47%	51.53%	2022 agricultural census
Listed operating solar capacity	49.89%	50.11%	August 2026
Mapped area occupied by buildings and other structures	14.46%	85.54%	2021 imagery
Mapped area of other hard surfaces	18.09%	81.91%	2021 imagery

The Shore hosts 692.3 MW of the 1,387.6 MW listed statewide. Put plainly, about half of the capacity in this inventory is located in a region with about half of Maryland's farmland and fewer than one in twelve of its residents. [5], [3], [1] That establishes concentration relative to population, while the farmland comparison gives a different perspective. It does not establish how much farmland has been converted, who uses the electricity, or how any individual community experiences a project. Those questions require land records, electricity-use information, and local evidence.

About 86% of the mapped area occupied by buildings and other structures in Maryland, and 82% of the mapped area of other hard surfaces, lie outside the Shore. The latter category includes parking, driveways, and sidewalks, with roads classified separately. [4], [16] These figures identify a broad area for investigation. They do not establish usable roof area, available parking-canopy

space, willing owners, or solar capacity. The useful next step is to assess particular properties and determine which can support a project.

The policy case follows from that practical task: where Maryland has already built, it should investigate what additional use those places can support. A well-assessed roof, parking area, or reuse site gives owners and decision-makers a choice they can evaluate against a field proposal.

County differences within the regional total

A regional position draws its strength from representing all nine counties, including the places hosting the largest shares of the listed capacity. The county totals show where those operating systems are concentrated. [5]

County	Operating solar capacity
Caroline County	145.8 MW AC
Cecil County	13.8 MW AC
Dorchester County	129.8 MW AC
Kent County	67.3 MW AC
Queen Anne's County	166.8 MW AC
Somerset County	122.8 MW AC
Talbot County	1.5 MW AC
Wicomico County	26.1 MW AC
Worcester County	18.4 MW AC
Nine-county total	692.3 MW AC

Queen Anne's, Caroline, Dorchester, and Somerset counties together host 565.2 MW AC, about 82% of the Shore total. Their experience belongs at the center of a regional discussion, alongside the priorities of counties with smaller operating totals. A shared position will be stronger when it reflects each county's experience. [5]

The state also describes a regional concentration of projects. The Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) hosting-capacity FAQ reports that about 70% of Maryland's proposed and operating solar projects, in the bulk-power-grid context, are on the Eastern Shore. The page gives no observation date for that figure. It counts projects in that context, including proposals, and is not a measure of all solar capacity, electricity, or occupied land. [67]

Water and sewer capacity can determine when a town's planned growth becomes possible, and each county is working from different conditions. Queen Anne's County's August 2026 notice identifies limited wastewater capacity in a particular service area, while Wicomico County's April 2026 release describes preliminary engineering and a new water and sewer advisory board. Both examples explain why officials need to consider a parcel's planned role and the public work required to support it. [17], [18]

What each county brings to the discussion

County records show different questions about land, local plans, and project scale. The examples below identify decisions to examine, with applications and approvals kept separate from operating equipment. They do not establish that every county opposes solar or that every proposal creates the same conflict.

Caroline County: The county has warned that converting agricultural land to solar could affect farming viability, agricultural support services, and the regional agricultural economy. [57] Its published 2025 planning annual-report packet says, "The Eastern Shore should not be disproportionately burdened in the pursuit of clean energy." [66] That is a county policy assessment, distinct from a statistical measure of the region's land impacts.

Cecil County: The North Telegraph Road Solar 1 application describes agricultural fields in a Suburban Transition Residential zone, with prime farmland within the proposed disturbance area. [60] That combination calls for attention to both present agricultural use and the location's role in local land-use planning.

Dorchester County: The Blue Crab application describes a 100 MW AC solar design on a leased tract containing agricultural fields and forested land. [61] It illustrates the scale of land decisions that a regional position must address. The application does not establish that this capacity is operating or ready for construction.

Kent County: Chestertown's adopted plan identifies a long commitment of growth land at Clark Farm, while Betterton officials have opposed the Halo proposal because of the town's intended residential and mixed-use growth. [6], [58] These are municipal-growth examples within a broader regional discussion.

Queen Anne's County: The Kent Point Road application describes a largely forested parcel in the Countryside zone, where the county permits community solar. [62] Its land questions extend beyond farmland to the existing woodland and the conditions under which a permitted use would proceed.

Somerset County: The Old Princess Anne application describes agricultural fields, forests, and wetlands on land zoned General Industrial. [63] The county's example shows why a zoning label alone does not explain what a site currently supports or which environmental conditions need attention.

Talbot County: The Commission granted a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity for the 61.2 MW Crockett Solar I project in January 2025. [64] That approval is distinct from Talbot's small operating total in the August 2026 inventory. [5] A small installed total is not evidence that a county has no significant siting decisions.

Wicomico County: The Wicomico Rayne application summary records county correspondence describing the proposal as inconsistent in scale and land use with adjacent development. [59] Salisbury University's completed parking canopies supply a different local example. [9] Both bring specific local choices into the regional discussion.

Worcester County: The Woodside application concerns land used for agriculture within an Agricultural zone and a Priority Preservation Area. [65] Berlin's completed public-roof installation supplies a different local example. [21] Both belong in a county discussion about where additional generation could go.

Keep room for towns to grow

The value of land near a town can be easier to understand through a decision than through a regional ratio. Morgnec Road Solar, on the Clark Farm property near Chestertown, presents two public judgments about the same location. In April 2022, the Maryland Public Service Commission affirmed a finding that the project would not unreasonably interfere with the town's likely growth during the project's life. Chestertown adopted its updated comprehensive plan on June 1, 2026. Its northeast planning discussion identifies the area as the town's primary growth area and says the Clark Farm project delays other potential development for "at least 30 years." The plan also identifies necessary water and sewer expansion. [7], [19], [6]

The Commission's approval and the later town plan express different judgments about the same land. A decision about the project's life is also a decision about the time available to the community. A location expected to accommodate future homes or businesses may be committed through years in which those needs change. Review should put the adopted plan, likely growth, available alternatives, and necessary infrastructure before the decision-maker together. Chestertown's experience gives other towns a reason to document their own needs while choices remain open. [7], [6]

Betterton raises another town-growth question. July 2026 reporting describes town officials opposing the Halo project because they want residential and mixed-use development at that location, while state reviewers recommended approval. [58] The two Kent County examples make the growth issue concrete. Other counties' farmland, woodland, neighboring-use, and project-scale questions also belong in a shared Shore position.

Maryland's Priority Funding Areas guide growth-related state investment. A municipal comprehensive plan's Municipal Growth Element, the part addressing future growth and its needs, and its water-resource provisions give more context for a parcel's role. These records can explain why a location matters even when its future use still depends on service extensions or other public work. [20], [14]

Alternative locations for solar

Local examples and completed reuse projects

The Shore has already shown that panels can share space with other uses. In Easton and Berlin, solar installations use existing rooftops, and at Salisbury University, they shelter parked vehicles. These completed projects make the statewide proposal tangible, while landfill projects elsewhere show how land with a different development history can also contribute.

Eastcor's Easton installation places 378 panels on a commercial roof, with a combined panel rating of 107.73 kilowatts (kW). One megawatt equals 1,000 kilowatts. The building continues its existing use while its roof supports generation, leaving the ground available for other purposes. [8]

Public buildings offer a similar opportunity. Berlin completed a 48.9 kW installation across its Electrical Department office and an adjacent building in 2021, with $122,375 in state grant support. The town used property it already owned to participate in solar development. [21], [22]

At Salisbury University, four canopies over Lot H generate electricity and shelter parked vehicles while the lot continues to serve its existing purpose. Completed in 2017, the installation has a panel rating of 541.8 kW. Parking can therefore be part of an owner's solar assessment alongside the buildings themselves. [9]

Landfill reuse calls for a different assessment, including the conditions left by the site's earlier use. Maryland's 2024 landfill study identifies Shore candidates including Beulah, Newland Park, Nicholson, Berlin, and Midshore. These are locations for assessment, with suitability and availability to be established for each project. [23], [24]

Completed landfill projects show what that work can lead to. Dominion reports the 3 MW Ivy landfill project in Albemarle County, Virginia, operating since April 2026. Baltimore County's Parkton project was completed in October 2025 at a reported 7 MW. Both demonstrate generation on land whose earlier use places constraints on other development. [10], [25], [26]

For a school, medical campus, town, or business, these examples offer a practical starting point. The first questions concern the property itself: whether the roof can support the equipment, how parking must function, or what a former landfill requires. Helping owners answer those questions is part of preparing an alternative. It turns interest into a project that can be priced, connected, and considered.

Turn mapped space into places people can use

A map is useful only part of the way to that result. Each site needs its own assessment of owner interest, usable space, structural or ground conditions, and electrical connections. The broad mapped categories do not answer those questions. Maryland ought to carry the work beyond mapping so a list of possibilities becomes a list people can act on. [27]

Frederick County has begun that assessment outside the Shore. Its February 2026 Solar Blueprint estimates 2,666 acres of potentially viable parking area and 234 acres of rooftop area, while identifying substantial roof and cost constraints under its assumptions. The work gives Maryland a practical example of looking beyond mapped acreage to the conditions that would allow projects to proceed. [28]

State law already requires related work. State-owned-land suitability analysis is due December 1, 2026, and the Utility RELIEF Act requires a broader study identifying up to 50 priority energy sites by December 31, 2026. Those duties give the proposed solar list a place to begin. The next task is to connect mapping and studies with willing owners, preparation, approvals, and continuing updates across public and private locations. [29], [30]

How much solar

Make one large field understandable

A single large field and a collection of rooftops can look like entirely different propositions until their scale is made visible. Morgnec Road Solar provides a local reference: the August 2026 federal inventory lists it at 55.8 MW AC. [5] The illustrations below ask how many smaller installations would be needed to match that rated capacity. They show the coordination involved, rather than a set of available replacements for this particular project.

Solar panels produce direct current (DC), which inverters convert to alternating current (AC) for use by the electrical system. To compare the published panel ratings of the roof and canopy examples with Morgnec's AC rating, the illustrations use the PVWatts default ratio of 1.2 units of DC capacity for each unit of AC capacity. [31] These modeled ratings are not verified equipment ratings. Counts are rounded upward and compare capacity only. Annual generation, owner availability, and connection arrangements would require separate assessment.

Model	Capacity used in illustration	Installations to reach 55.8 MW AC
Eastcor-size commercial roof	About 90 kW AC, modeled	622
Salisbury Lot H-size installation, four canopies	About 452 kW AC, modeled	124 installations of four canopies each
Historical Hobbs-size landfill proposal	0.875 MW AC	64
Ivy-size landfill project	3 MW AC	19

The Hobbs comparison uses the size of a historical landfill proposal. Ivy provides a completed landfill example, using its documented AC design rating. [8], [9], [32], [25], [5]

Larger installations reduce the number of participating sites. The hypothetical mix below combines published reference sizes for roofs, parking canopies, and landfills to reach about 55.83 MW AC under the same conversion assumption. It shows the scale of a coordinated effort. The sites themselves still have to be found and assessed. [33], [34], [25]

Illustrative group	Number of sites	Combined capacity
Landfills, each 3 MW AC	3	9.00 MW AC
Larger roofs, each 2.597 MW DC	14	30.30 MW AC, modeled
Parking installations, each 1.3 MW DC	14	15.17 MW AC, modeled
Other commercial roofs, each 0.410 MW DC	4	1.37 MW AC, modeled
Total	35	55.83 MW AC, including modeled ratings

Totals are calculated before rounding. Displayed components may not sum exactly.

The 35-site illustration makes the organizational challenge tangible. A program would need to bring willing owners, project designs, financing, and electrical connections forward together. Smaller installations can contribute meaningfully, but a strategy intended to match large projects must also secure sites of sufficient size and coordinate their delivery. This is why the recommendations pair a statewide inventory with a funded pilot.

Making alternative locations workable

Explain the demand and the siting choices

Solar development responds to public policy, customer demand, and private investment. Maryland's Renewable Portfolio Standard requires covered electricity suppliers to obtain renewable energy credits, including solar credits, in relation to their retail sales. The requirements vary by supplier and do not assign counties a share of solar construction. Local leaders can ask what need a particular project serves and why its proposed location has been selected. [35]

On the Shore, Choptank Electric Cooperative serves portions of all nine counties, and cooperatives have a separate solar requirement. Municipal utilities also have their own schedule. Renewable credits demonstrate compliance with supplier rules without identifying where the electricity serving a particular customer was physically generated. [35], [36]

PJM Interconnection coordinates the regional electricity system and markets. The Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative addresses emissions from covered fossil-fuel generators. Neither assigns the Shore's nine counties a fixed solar-construction quota. [37], [38], [39], [35] For local leaders, the useful questions concern the proposal itself: its intended contribution, the electrical connection it needs, and the reasons for choosing this land.

Rural fields attract developers for understandable reasons. An industry presentation at Maryland's September 2024 AgriSolar Summit identified flat, dry land, proximity to transmission, and economies of scale as advantages. University of Maryland Extension's landowner curriculum directs attention to location, grid access, acreage, and lease terms. Those considerations help explain what developers may seek. Preparing alternative locations means addressing the same questions of access, cost, and usable space. Simply identifying a large roof would leave much of the problem untouched. [40], [41]

A town and a developer can also value the same location for different infrastructure reasons. Homes and businesses depend on suitable water and sewer service, and generation depends on an electrical connection. Morgnec's application-based state summary described a planned connection to the substation across Route 291 and no need for water or sewer after construction. That helps explain why electrical access and town-service readiness deserve separate attention when a community considers future uses of the land. [42]

What delivery will require

Alternative locations have to deliver electricity at a workable cost and pace. The U.S. Department of Energy's first-quarter 2025 modeled market-price benchmarks put a representative large solar system at $1.12 per watt DC and a smaller commercial school-roof system at $1.98 per watt DC, expressed in 2024 dollars. These figures exclude battery storage and owner subsidies. [43] They illustrate why preparing roofs and parking areas needs a realistic budget. A local comparison should identify the actual costs, expected production, schedule, and who would pay for the support needed to proceed.

Connection work can change that comparison substantially. Hosting-capacity maps show initial possibilities for adding generation to a distribution system, but project studies establish the upgrades, costs, limits, and timing. A group of roofs may involve several connections. Early utility assessment would help reviewers and developers understand what they are comparing. Maryland's quarterly hosting-capacity reporting updates begin in January 2027, subject to Commission waivers for good cause, providing another source of screening information. [44], [45]

A field project can offer benefits that matter to the people involved. A lease may provide income a farm family values highly, while public revenue depends on the project's tax treatment and any applicable agreement. Qualifying community solar and specified nonresidential roof or canopy projects can receive exemptions. [41], [46], [47] Officials should distinguish the owner's income, county revenue, subscriber savings, and any separately negotiated public benefit so residents can understand what the community would actually receive.

Some proposals combine solar with agricultural production, an approach called agrivoltaics. Maryland research has examined adoption barriers and stakeholder views. A proposal can explain what would be grown or grazed, who would manage that work, and how equipment and production would function. An operating plan and a way to assess results would let reviewers examine the agricultural use alongside the generation. [48]

Some alternatives may remain more costly or slower after assessment. A useful review would explain those obstacles and the consequences of selecting the field, including the duration and extent of the land commitment. Where a roof, canopy, or reuse site can meet the need under workable conditions, priority consideration should give it a meaningful place in the decision. Where it cannot, the record should show what further preparation, investment, or policy change might make similar locations viable in the future.

Fund the work that makes alternative locations workable

State support already provides several starting points. The fiscal year 2026 Solar Technical Assistance program offered preliminary help for eligible government buildings and parking projects. The fiscal year 2027 Commercial & Community Buildings program supports eligible solar for nonprofits, local governments, and local education agencies, including specified preparation attached to a project. It excludes feasibility studies, so early screening needs an

eligible funding route of its own. [49], [50] Leaders should confirm each program's current application window and eligible expenses before building it into a project budget.

Community-solar support can reach qualifying landfill and brownfield projects, with substantial benefits required for low-income subscribers. Enhanced solar credits also give qualifying generation additional compliance value. These routes make it worth developing a pilot budget that separates the cost of maintaining the list, preliminary assessments, and preparation attached to actual projects. Each part can then be matched to an eligible owner, expense, and funding source. [51], [52]

The Strategic Energy Investment Fund, administered by the Maryland Energy Administration, offers another potential route, subject to the uses and beneficiaries specified for its accounts. The Administration and legislators would need to match proposed expenses with the applicable authority and funding. Beginning with a manageable group of sites would allow Maryland to establish the cost of preparation before expanding the effort. [53], [54], [30]

What communities can protect, influence, or agree to

Work within the current authority

Local leadership matters most when it brings a clear account of the place and a practical request into the decision. The Maryland Public Service Commission decides generating-station applications subject to the Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity process. Public Utilities §7-207 provides for local notice, hearings, public comment, and consideration of local recommendations and planning concerns. Communities can use those opportunities to explain a parcel's role, document a conflict, and request changes, with the final decision resting at the state level. [11]

The Renewable Energy Certainty Act of 2025, House Bill 1036, limits certain local restrictions on covered solar stations above 1 MW AC. Local zoning alone therefore cannot settle the siting question, which is why the request for a statewide approach belongs in Annapolis. The resulting §7-218 includes conditional protections for specified growth and preservation areas. Its growth provision addresses covered stations above 5 MW AC using designated areas as they existed on January 1, 2025, subject to the statute's Commission authority and transition rules. The threshold leaves smaller projects outside that particular protection. It does not establish a blanket local veto or retroactively settle Morgnec's earlier approval. [55], [12] The statute's specific area definitions and January 2025 reference date mean that a current comprehensive-plan growth designation does not by itself establish eligibility for that protection.

Rooftop and carport systems are excluded from §7-218, along with qualifying brownfield and behind-the-meter systems. Brownfield eligibility follows the statutory definition, and behind-the-

meter generation is on the customer's side of the meter. Other applicable approvals still matter when an owner considers one of these locations. [12]

Promises about returning land to another use also belong in the approval discussion. For covered stations, §7-218 requires a decommissioning agreement and financial assurance. Decommissioning means removing the installation when its use ends, with financial assurance securing the money needed for that work. The requirements address future removal costs, the value of equipment recovered at removal, and five-year updates. Local officials can examine who is responsible, what money secures the work, and what restoration the agreement actually requires. A long-term land commitment ought to come with terms that make the promised return understandable and enforceable. [12]

Bring evidence and workable proposals

A community can begin by explaining what the land supports today and what its adopted plans say about tomorrow. The record can identify agricultural use, a growth designation, the infrastructure work involved, and the duration of the proposed commitment. Those details allow a decision-maker to consider a specific conflict and a requested safeguard or different siting choice. They also give the county or town a clearer basis for speaking beyond its own proceeding. A useful local submission should connect each concern with the relevant plan or record and the specific change being requested. Early participation should include affected residents, farmers, landowners, and businesses, whose experience can reveal consequences that a regional total will not show.

Voluntary agreements with willing owners may preserve other choices. A municipality could explore advance notice, a first offer, a purchase option, or a negotiated right of first refusal, which would give it an agreed opportunity to respond to a proposed transaction. Counsel would have to establish the terms and enforceability, and the municipality would require authority and resources to act. The value of such an agreement lies in what the community can do when the opportunity arrives.

A maintained statewide list would give applicants practical alternatives to examine. In the Morgnec order, the Commission rejected an exhaustive search of every preferable parcel as an impossible burden. Continuing preparation by state and local offices, working with willing owners, would give review a defined starting point. Existing application regulations require reasons for site and design selection. A binding duty to consider listed alternatives would need to be established through the appropriate legal authority. [7], [56]

Recommendations: Put the evidence to work across Maryland

Maryland ought to connect its solar policy with a coordinated effort to understand land commitments, prepare suitable alternatives, and make the reasons for siting decisions clear. The nine Eastern Shore counties and their municipalities should help shape that effort. Each county needs a strategy grounded in its own evidence, the Shore needs a regional position that represents its different circumstances, and the state needs a framework that connects those perspectives with energy delivery.

The recommendations below would give that work a common direction. They respect private owners' voluntary choices and recognize that some field locations may remain suitable after alternatives are assessed. Their purpose is to make more choices available and give decision-makers a clearer account of what each choice would require and commit. A statewide solar policy ought to come with a serious statewide effort to prepare suitable places for it.

Reconcile existing evidence and maintain an integrated public record

Maryland should build on the regional operating-capacity comparison and other available studies to establish a consistently measured account of solar acreage, installation types, development stages, and change over time in the nine Shore counties and the rest of the state. The study should distinguish operating, under-construction, approved, and proposed projects, explain AC and DC capacity ratings, and separate property acreage, leased or otherwise committed land, permitted disturbance, panel footprint, and verified prior agricultural use.

The study should distinguish ground-mounted, rooftop, and parking-canopy installations and identify its coverage of smaller systems. It should compare the Shore's shares of statewide ground-mounted solar acreage and capacity with its shares of statewide land and agricultural land, using explicit definitions for each measure. A broader all-solar capacity comparison should be reported separately. Electricity consumption can provide an additional comparison where geographically comparable data support it. These benchmarks should inform policy judgment without being presented as an objective formula for fairness.

Maryland's DNR project-review records and the Commission's siting-case records provide a foundation. [70], [64] The August 2026 federal inventory and Queen Anne's County's February 2025 account of land and capacity commitments contribute different measures and development stages that the study should reconcile. [5], [68] The 2026 Utility RELIEF Act also directs the Commission to develop dashboards for major energy programs, including net metering and energy storage. [30] The proposed regional comparison should connect with that work where feasible, adding the land and status detail needed for siting decisions.

Counties, universities, regional organizations, or independent researchers can undertake the initial comparison using public records while longer-term arrangements are established. The state should evaluate suitable work for publication, integration, and continuing maintenance, avoiding unnecessary duplication. The comparison should include a clearly dated current snapshot and, where records permit reliable reconstruction, year-end 2024 and 2025 snapshots. Each measure should retain its observation dates and coverage statement, with missing acreage, uncertain operating dates, and unverified prior agricultural use identified.

A designated state office should maintain the reconciled records through one recognizable entry point on a Maryland government website, using or connecting existing platforms where feasible. Readers should be able to select a county, examine the Eastern Shore together, or compare regions statewide, with access to maps, downloadable data, source documents, definitions, and observation dates. Source agencies should retain their authoritative records, with reconciled comparisons linked back to them.

Counties should contribute local records under common standards, with technical and financial support from the state and lawful protections for sensitive information. Independent research can establish the initial comparison. Continuing state stewardship should keep it useful for decisions.

Develop county strategies with municipal participation

Each Shore county should bring its solar records, adopted plans, agricultural priorities, infrastructure conditions, and potential alternative sites into a local strategy. Municipalities should participate so that town-growth needs and public-property opportunities are represented. The strategy should identify the decisions approaching, the evidence needed, the opportunities worth preparing, and the safeguards or changes officials intend to request. Each strategy should produce an agreed set of local priorities, a list of approaching project decisions, and named staff contacts. County and municipal leaders should seek input from affected residents and landowners and identify which concerns are shared and which remain specific to a town or neighborhood.

Counties and towns should use the consultation and review opportunities described earlier to present documented local priorities, request project-specific changes, and explain the consequences of proposed land commitments. [56], [11]

Local options should remain tied to the particular place and transaction. Officials can evaluate voluntary agreements with willing owners, the resources needed to act on those agreements, and project-specific requests concerning restoration, neighboring uses, agricultural operations, and public benefits. Counsel should determine the authority and enforceability of any proposed agreement or requirement.

Build a coordinated Eastern Shore strategy

County and municipal leaders should begin by designating representatives to agree on a regional coordinating arrangement, using an existing forum where practical. That arrangement should

assemble local strategies, identify shared concerns, and bring a common request to Maryland while preserving differences in development patterns, agricultural economies, infrastructure, and growth plans. Its first deliverable should be a joint statement of shared requests, supported by county-specific records and a clear account of any differences that remain.

The regional assessment should explain what kind of concentration or disadvantage is being raised and which evidence supports it. Capacity, occupied land, agricultural exposure, and local development constraints answer different questions. A common position should identify the comparison being used and state policy judgments openly, without inventing a regional quota or assuming that every county takes the same position on every project.

Caroline's published planning-report packet explicitly calls for avoiding a disproportionate Eastern Shore burden, while the state's solar incentives task-force record contains differing views about geographic allocation and infrastructure constraints. [66], [69] Those public positions support a coordinated discussion, with the magnitude and nature of any claimed burden established separately.

Prepare and map assessed alternative locations statewide

Counties, municipalities, institutions, businesses, and willing owners should identify rooftop, parking, landfill, brownfield, and other reuse candidates. The state should compile these contributions into an alternative-site inventory connected to the existing-project record through the same public resource. The two components should distinguish projects already operating or in development from potential locations. Alternative-site entries should use common assessment standards and separate labels for mapped possibilities, screened sites, assessed owner-available locations, and committed projects.

Each entry should explain usable area, plausible capacity and its rating basis, owner participation, structural or environmental conditions, connection prospects, approvals, remaining work, and the date checked. A list should show what a developer or owner would need to establish next, with public contact information limited to what is appropriate for disclosure. Participating counties should use the same inventory to guide their own preparation priorities.

This work should connect with existing state initiatives. State Government §9-2017 already provides for a SmartDG+ update covering suitable state-owned land and a state-land suitability analysis due December 1, 2026. [29] The proposed inventory would extend coordination and continuing assessment across participating public and private locations.

Fund preparation and test delivery

Maryland should establish a pilot with a defined budget, participating sites, and review date to help willing owners move promising alternatives toward operation. It should test structural and environmental assessment, connection needs, design, financing, procurement, and schedules. Shore sites should participate alongside sites elsewhere in Maryland, selected for suitability, owner interest, learning value, and delivery prospects.

The pilot budget should distinguish public-resource maintenance, preliminary screening, project assessment, physical preparation, and construction, matching each expense to an eligible funding route and identifying gaps before support is promised. [50]

Utilities and technical partners should help identify connection requirements early. Shared procurement and groups of participating owners should be tested where they can reduce administrative burdens or improve delivery. The pilot should report both successful projects and obstacles that preparation does not overcome, including alternatives that remain more costly or slower. Before expanding the program, the state should assess delivered capacity and generation, public support per project, costs borne by owners and ratepayers, and the reasons sites advanced or stopped.

Establish a lawful, documented siting-review standard

Maryland should establish, through the appropriate legal authority, a siting-review standard that gives relevant, assessed, owner-available alternatives priority consideration alongside documented local land priorities. The comparison should address project scale, electricity contribution, electrical needs, costs, and schedule, including coordinated groups of sites where they can credibly meet the need. The standard should define which alternatives are relevant, when the comparison occurs, and a reasonable review period so applicants and communities understand the work required.

When productive farmland or planned growth land is selected, the decision should explain the local land commitment and why relevant alternatives could not meet the project's needs under workable conditions. Review should also address neighboring uses, agricultural operating commitments where proposed, and the scope and enforceability of restoration assurances.

The assessed-site inventory would give review a defined starting point consistent with the practical limitation discussed in the Morgnec order. [7] The Commission, with legal advice, should determine how existing site-selection disclosure requirements can support the proposed standard and which changes require rulemaking or legislation, distinguishing disclosure duties from substantive approval standards. [56]

Legislators should evaluate any proposed changes to the statutory protections described earlier against documented local conflicts and energy-delivery consequences. [12]

Assign responsibility and report results

The state work plan should name the office responsible for the shared public resource, participating agencies, county and regional contacts, funding responsibilities, delivery milestones, and reporting dates. Counties should maintain their agreed contributions and review local strategies with support proportionate to the work. The regional coordinating arrangement should report progress on shared requests and participation. The plan should set dates for the first reconciled comparison, initial assessed-site inventory, and pilot review, with resources matched to each commitment.

The responsible office should publish an update schedule and correction process for both components of the public resource, make material status corrections, and report program outcomes annually. Reporting should track assessed and owner-available sites, operating capacity, supported generation figures, costs, connection and approval timing, participation, and documented land commitments. Any claim of land saved should identify the development scenario used for comparison and distinguish an estimate from an observed outcome.

Reporting should lead to decisions about which sites to advance, which obstacles need intervention, and which policies or funding arrangements to adjust. Maintaining the record and using it are continuing responsibilities.

Match each responsibility to the appropriate authority

The work plan should distinguish voluntary cooperation, agency administration, regulatory requirements, statutory duties, and funding decisions. It should state the legal route for each proposed compulsory duty before describing that duty as enforceable.

Proposed responsibility	Initial route	Additional action to determine
Compile local records, develop county strategies, and coordinate the Shore's position	Voluntary participation and action within each jurisdiction's existing authority, supported by common standards and resources	Any compulsory reporting or participation mandate needs a specific lawful basis.
Maintain the statewide record and assessed-site inventory	Identify an accountable state office, connect existing resources, and establish supported interagency and local arrangements	Determine whether a permanent assignment, reporting mandate, or required appropriation needs legislation.
Add project filing and status-update requirements	Commission and agency review of existing information requirements and applicable approval pathways	Specify rulemaking where authorized. Seek legislation where the proposed duty exceeds existing authority.
Make relevant alternatives a binding consideration in approvals	Commission review, with legal advice, of authority to require disclosure, priority consideration, or approval conditions	Rulemaking or legislation as required by that review.
Fund the pilot and continuing maintenance	Match eligible activities and owners with available program authority and appropriated funds	Identify appropriation needs and any statutory changes needed for otherwise ineligible activities.
Change statutory siting protections or create a new statutory mandate	A defined legislative proposal supported by the documented problem and expected consequences	Legislation is required to amend the statute or create the proposed statutory duty.

This approach would let supported preparatory work begin while the legal route for new binding duties is resolved. Regional coordination would provide a shared position and working arrangement, not an assumed new approval authority.

Begin with a joint work plan

The county and municipal representatives should submit a joint request to the Governor's Office to designate a state convener and arrange a working session with relevant agencies, Commission representatives, legislators, utilities, and technical partners. The session should resolve the initial study's scope, stewardship of the shared public resource, county participation, the alternative-site pilot, and the legal pathway for review requirements.

The request should seek a written response within 30 days of receipt, a working session within 90 days after acceptance, and publication of the work plan within 60 days after the session. These are proposed management targets, not existing legal deadlines. If no response arrives within 30 days, the representatives should follow up jointly and publish the request's status.

County and municipal leaders can prepare local records and priorities while the state arrangements take shape, and independent researchers can begin the comparison. The regional representatives should use that early work to inform the joint request.

What Maryland carries forward

Private choice and public responsibility both belong in the conversation. A coordinated approach can respect a farm family's decision, take a town's future seriously, and help Maryland prepare other places for generation. Caroline, Cecil, Dorchester, Kent, Queen Anne's, Somerset, Talbot, Wicomico, and Worcester counties, together with their municipalities, should each have a clear place in that work.

The choice of a solar location is also a choice about what remains possible in that place. The farmer and fisherman on Maryland's seal bring us back to what the state carries forward. Energy development belongs in that future, alongside working land and communities with room to grow. Accessible evidence, prepared alternatives, and decisions with clear reasons would help Maryland pursue those responsibilities together.

Glossary

- **Capacity:** The rated power of equipment. It differs from electricity produced over a year.
- **kW and MW:** Kilowatts and megawatts of power. One MW equals 1,000 kW.
- **AC and DC:** Alternating current and direct current. Solar panels produce DC electricity, and inverters convert it to AC. Panel and grid-facing ratings are not interchangeable.
- **kWh and MWh:** Kilowatt-hours and megawatt-hours of electricity produced or used over time. One MWh equals 1,000 kWh.
- **Renewable Portfolio Standard:** Maryland's supplier-compliance framework for eligible renewable energy credits.
- **Tier 1 and Tier 2:** Statutory categories of eligible renewable sources, with different compliance requirements. Solar is included within Tier 1.
- **Hosting capacity:** A screening estimate of generation a part of the distribution grid may accommodate. Project studies determine actual connection conditions.
- **Impervious surface:** A constructed surface that limits water infiltration. In the cited mapping, structures, roads, and other impervious surfaces are separate classes.
- **Maryland Public Service Commission:** The state body that decides covered generating-station applications and regulates public utilities.
- **Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity:** A state approval pathway for covered generating facilities.
- **PJM:** PJM Interconnection, the regional electricity-system and market operator.
- **RGGI:** Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, an emissions-allowance program for covered fossil-fuel generators.
- **Priority Funding Area:** A designation used in Maryland's growth-related state funding framework.
- **Municipal Growth Element:** The part of a municipal comprehensive plan addressing growth and its related needs.
- **Strategic Energy Investment Fund:** A fund administered by the Maryland Energy Administration, with specified uses and beneficiary requirements.
- **Agrivoltaics:** Solar generation combined with agricultural production on the same land.
- **Decommissioning:** Removal of an installation when its use ends, with restoration determined by the applicable agreement and requirements.
- **Financial assurance:** Security for the money needed to carry out a future obligation, such as decommissioning.
- **Right of first refusal:** A negotiated right to respond to a proposed transaction under agreed terms.
- **Reuse site:** A place where prior use or physical conditions limit conventional development and where solar may be suitable.
- **Productive farmland:** Land supporting an agricultural operation, with use checked in the parcel record.
- **Planned growth land:** Land identified for future community growth in a current adopted plan. Designation does not establish immediate construction readiness.

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https://dnr.maryland.gov/pprp/pages/hosting-capacity-faq.aspx

68. Queen Anne's County Department of Planning & Zoning. Amy G. Moredock, February 28, 2025 legislative testimony. County commitments across operating, construction, and approval statuses compared with projected statewide needs. Testimony packet, PDF pages 184 to 187.
https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/cmte_testimony/2025/ecm/27631_03242025_183733-534.pdf

69. Maryland Task Force to Study Solar Incentives. April 2024 report, Appendix A, page A-20. Proposals and stakeholder comments concerning geographic allocation and infrastructure, not an adopted regional quota.
https://dlslibrary.state.md.us/publications/Exec/MEA/SB469Ch545%282023%29_2023.pdf

70. Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Power Plant Research Program. Projects Under Review. Public review register with project descriptions and linked case records. Consulted October 2, 2026; not a complete operating inventory.
https://dnr.maryland.gov/pprp/pages/projects-under-review.aspx