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STAFF WRITER

A group formed in opposition to the Birch Solar project met with the Auglaize County commissioners Thursday afternoon, asking them to sign a resolution opposing Birch Solar Project and a resolution opposing a payment in lieu of taxes for the project. Director Shanelle Montana had told commissioners previously the PILOT would not impact whether or not the project moved forward.

After the meeting Commissioner John Bergman said commissioners still had a lot to discuss, and reminded the project hasn't been submitted to the Ohio Siting Board at this stage.

Jim Thompson, the main spokesperson for the group, said they have had issues with sincerity and honesty with Lightsource bp representatives regarding their involvement in negotiations with the Allen County Auditor's office.

As an example, Thompson disputed a claim that Lightsource bp representatives were disinvited from a meeting. He said the opposition group allowed the company officials to attend; in turn, Lightsource bp declined a request to change the date of their informational meeting.

Wildlife concerns are one of the reasons the group opposes the solar farm.

Thompson claimed 11 endangered species resided within the project envelope, including eagles.

Andy Farley, group member, said wildlife officials told him white tail deer migrate through the pathway.

Thompson discussed high water concerns, as the area is well-known for localized flooding with water standing in some fields. He city concerns about storm water management.

Shanelle Montana, the Birch Solar project director, who was listening in on the Zoom call, had said earlier they would have a plan to mitigate stormwater drainage issues.

Thompson said there was a lack of local control in the process, which he said was a hard pill to swallow as an area resident.

Anita Doll, group member, said she is concerned about potential lead exposure from the solar project and projected that a project with 1.5 million panels could contain 20 tons of lead, which she theorized could be compacted into the soil. Doll was worried about lead leaching into the water supply, which would subject children to tainted water.

Another group member, Mark Wellman said the projects being built of similar size aren't in residential areas. They are mostly in areas with little to no residents. He said there aren't many houses near a solar project happening in Hardin County.

Doll said a Hardin County resident reported a property value decrease of \$40,000 after a solar project was installed.

Wellman also said that a failed solar project, Crescent Dunes, took \$510 million dollars to clean up. He said that the 25 to 28 projects on the OPSB website were in more rural areas with less population density.

Thompson said the initial footprint was 2,600 acres, but there are two other solar developers larger than Lightsource bp actively seeking to develop the land. He said the farmer he spoke with had seen interest from developers, mostly in Auglaize County west of Kemp Road and south of Hume Road. He said the developer was interested in

working with farmers individually or working with Lightsource as a company.

“This isn’t just a one time 2,600 acre development,” Thompson said. “It’s going to grow.” Farley and Thompson said there wasn’t any substantial job growth that might justify preferential tax treatment.

Thompson claimed with the PILOT there would be potentially \$24 million dollars less going to schools over the 30-year period, and \$10 million dollars less to townships and \$7 million dollars less to counties. He also said after the tax credit period is up, solar developments tend to get sold.

Jill Barnes, also a group member, was concerned about farmers having to find new fields to farm and said none of the fields have been sitting empty.