

## From STAFF REPORTS

Lightsource bp continues to move forward with developing the Birch Solar project in Allen and Auglaize Counties.

While the megawatts have stayed consistent throughout the project, the area of impact has consolidated from 1900 acres in December to 1410 acres. This footprint will be part of the OPSB permit applications, with no ability to expand.

The Birch Solar Project is designed for 360 megawatts (MW-DC)/ 300 megawatts (MW-AC) of installed capacity. The power will be sold into the grid via an existing electrical substation that is located adjacent to the north side of the project site, and no new high-voltage transmission lines will be required.

"It's tricky, It took us a lot longer than it normally would when we are developing a project, because we had to go back and forth with our engineers to make sure we are adding in all the different constraints including setbacks, buffers and fencing.

"My engineer's like oh my goodness how many different setbacks and layers are you going to have?" Montana said. She said they wanted to be thorough to accommodate requests from the community.

Their goal is to design Birch Solar to balance the desire of local farmers to use their farmland for a solar project, while providing additional renewable energy development and infrastructure to meet the growing clean energy demands from Ohioans and businesses in the state. Lightsource is responding to requests from the community surrounding the project to screen and set back the project from home and roads and to minimize changes to the natural environment. "Our approach is to work with the local community and neighbors to ensure that we develop and construct our projects as a good neighbor and long-term member of the local community," Montana said.

In connection with developing the Birch Solar project, developers have received input from local area farmers, local officials and other government agencies, and from members of the local community. This was accomplished through in-person open houses, the online presentations and Q&A session, and many other one-on-one or smaller group meetings with members of the community. They have also worked with Utility Scale Solar Energy Coalition to have a survey conducted statewide and in the lima area showing support for solar energy.

When asked if that survey is conclusive based on those surveyed Montana said surveys are a sample in time regardless of the sample size. She said ohioans have been consistent in supporting clean energy across different time periods. Montana said a survey was conducted five years ago with similar results.

Montana said that there is a vocal minority who are against solar energy.

"That doesn't speak for the entire county or the entire township" Montana said. "I'm not here to shove a project down someone's throat. We are here because we have interested landowners." She said Lightsource have stayed in contact with legislators regarding solar referendum legislation and felt they listen to local farmers, landowners and their interests.

Based on final design considerations for this project location, along with incorporating comments received from the community, Birch Solar are implementing the following:

- • A 6-foot high discreet cedar post farm fence around the project to match the aesthetic of the surrounding area, with 5 foot evergreen trees that will top 8 feet tall when mature and shrubs planted outside the fenced in areas within nearby homeowner views to enhance residents' viewsheds and limit project visibility.
- • Increased home setbacks with at least 300 feet of green space from any solar panels, including a 300 foot setback from any panels visible from Breese Road, and the elimination of all solar panels originally identified north of Breese Road. These setbacks will be part of the permit application and will be maintained as green space during the full project life with no ability to expand into this area.
- • Maintaining the natural environment of the area and conserving habitats by not removing wooded areas or wetlands, with generous setbacks from any wetland areas to ensure they are undisturbed.
- • Creation of pollinator habitat to boost local biodiversity and foster wildlife habitat, including potential sheep grazing on a portion of the land, if acceptable to the community.
- • Commitment to recycling all solar panels, including any panels damaged during construction, operations, and all panels remaining at the end of project life requiring decommissioning using qualified US recycling facilities that have been fully approved by the Solar Energy Industry Association.
- • Commitment to only using Tier 1 manufactured solar panels that have passed testing protocols established by the EPA under Federal Law, to ensure that even if broken into pieces the solar panels will not release harmful amounts of any hazardous materials into the environment.
- • A \$500,000 community fund for Allen and Auglaize Counties for use in connection with various programs to be recommended by the community.
- • An enhanced Neighboring Landowner Benefit Program for homeowners whose property is bordering our leased land or whose homes are within 500 feet of the project's solar panels to benefit with financial compensation to compensate for the inconveniences created by the installation of the project on their neighbor's land. The program is voluntary, and no support for the project or confidentiality is required on the part of the homeowner.

We will continue to provide project updates through our new project website at [www.birchsolarfarm.com](http://www.birchsolarfarm.com).

The website includes a video featuring Paul Neff, one of the Lima-area farmers leasing his land for the project, and Shanelle Montana, director of development for Lightsource bp. The video includes 3D simulations of the project.