

BY BOB TOMASZEWSKI
STAFF WRITER

Lightsource bp, the company that wants in install a solar panel field in southern Allen County and two Auglaize County townships, met with county officials Tuesday to answer questions about the proposed project.

The company's developmental directors, Shanelle Montana and David Powell, requested the meeting to share information about the Birch Solar Project and answer commissioners' questions.

The 2,600 acre solar project proposed for Logan, Duchouquet and Shawnee townships is expected to use 1,600 acres of fenced area and about 900 acres of actual solar fields — about 400 acres would be in Auglaize County.

The goal for the entire project is to generate 300 megawatts of alternating current.

Montana said they recognized it was a change for some people, acknowledging some of the opposition the project has received.

Commissioner John Bergman told the project managers he was a stickler on drainage for the project. Montana explained their lease agreement made clear they would be responsible for repairing any damaged tile.

Bergman also was concerned about aging tile that may need to be replaced. Powell said they were already beginning coordination with the Auglaize County Engineer's Office.

Montana said they were trying to catalog all private and public drainage systems in the area.

Commissioner Doug Spencer asked about a concerned landowner whose property may be surrounded on three sides by solar fields. Montana explained they are rolling out an adjacent landowner payment plan to mitigate views based on how the project affects nearby residences. Those most affected could receive payments of \$25,000 to \$50,000, while others could receive \$5,000. Montana said they work with landowners through that mitigation process.

Commissioners Don Regula and Spencer were both concerned about how property values were affected.

Powell said the solar field would bring in an estimated \$81 million in tax revenue.

Spencer also asked about the company's expectations for preferential tax treatment. He said he was against preferential treatment when a wind energy proposal came before them in 2012 and his feelings haven't changed.

Montana said they wanted to be transparent; they intended to ask for a \$2.7 million annual payment in lieu of taxes. That money would be consistent. She said 54 percent would go to area schools, 5 percent to Apollo Career Center, 17 percent to counties and about 24 percent to townships.

Bergman was concerned about land being taxed at a higher rate as it was no longer being used for agriculture. Montana said they would be paying any additional tax as part of the lease agreement. She said several landowners have signed on to participate.

An unofficial public information session is scheduled at Apollo Career Center Wednesday from 6-8 p.m. for the purposes of community outreach.

Official public meetings will be held Friday and on Monday. Those meetings can be accessed by calling 877-229-8493 with access code 120041#.