We are writing this letter on behalf of the Citizen’s Voice of Mason County, a 501(c))(4) organization dedicated to advancing smart-growth, enduring economic development, government transparency, and sound infrastructure in Maysville-Mason County, through land-use advocacy, education, and research.

Through these efforts, we will achieve a prosperous and attractive community in the heart of our beautiful and productive Bluegrass/Appalachian landscape in Mason County.

It’s about moving our special communities and farms forward in Maysville-Mason County…together. And in so doing, promoting what makes our home so very special.

We, the citizens of Mason County, are only yet beginning to realize the scale and scope of the industrial solar projects being proposed, through recently mandated developer informational meetings and the continued presence of multiple companies. It is clear that out-of-state developers are demanding our county consider the wide-scale conversion in land use of potentially tens of thousands of acres of our best and finite ag lands to industrial solar projects so they can generate green energy credits here, but sell them elsewhere out of the county, for corporate profit and consumption.

Merchant scale industrial solar facilities constitute a significant change in land use policy for this county—with both short- and long-term impacts to our local taxpayers, real estate markets, job creation strategies, signature agricultural industries, watersheds and soils, historic resources, and cultural brand. The solar panels are made of heavy toxic metals with a shelf-life of roughly 20 years. They will displace thousands of acres of our finite rural landscape, while destabilizing property values; creating only a few permanent jobs for local residents; posing numerous financial liabilities for our municipal government coffers; generating significant water run-off; compromising the “carbon sink” of our natural greenspaces; and eroding the “factory floor” of our food industry here in Mason County.

Under the light of day, many questions must be asked about industrial solar such as:

* What is the community’s vision for Maysville-Mason County in the 21st century?
* Do widespread industrial solar facilities support this vision? If so, where should these be located to minimize impacts to our neighbors, environment, properties, and quality of life?
* What is Maysville-Mason County’s agricultural economic development plan, and does industrial solar advance our livestock, equine, local food, and tourism enterprises? Is Mason County uniquely positioned to progressively strengthen and utilize the county’s railway and river transportation infrastructure to promote sustainable agricultural food and forage production, support our associated ag businesses and payrolls, and provide access to new and emerging agricultural markets?
* What is industrial solar’s role in reducing the carbon-footprint in lieu of farms utilizing other available land-use practices and approaches in Mason County? How much energy will these facilities generate for local use?
* With limited land supplies in Mason County, is industrial solar a preferred type of economic development that will generate the most local jobs and government revenues over other types of growth in our community?
* What is Maysville-Mason County’s financial outlook? Can local taxpayers afford to maintain, de-commission, and remediate widespread industrial solar facilities should they fall into disrepair or abandonment?

Everything about industrial-scale solar facilities is new for our community—and our current zoning ordinance does not currently contemplate or regulate them.

Is this a fair deal for all Mason Countians? The answer must be calculated carefully, and under the microscope of objective research, analysis, and public engagement. An update to our Comprehensive Plan is the venue for such deliberations.

Maysville-Mason County deserves better. Yesterday, Clark County Fiscal Court unanimously approved a resolution which imposed a moratorium on any industrial solar in the county prior to addressing it in a comprehensive land use plan study and revision (if appropriate). In contrast, our county is considering an amended or spot zoning process under a perceived threat of the state controlling the siting process for us.

Our county should follow the example of Clark County and the recommendation of the American Planning Association on this issue and “review and amend our Comprehensive Plan to align with how (our) community wants to regulate utility-scale solar uses.”1 Under KRS 100 and Kentucky law, the Comprehensive Plan sets the stage for all land-uses, and related planning and zoning ordinances in Maysville-Mason County. Therefore, it is the very foundation of control for how our community grows and operates smartly…now and in the future.

Once the panels are installed it will be too late to consider the long-term consequences to the county.  We must issue a one-year moratorium and convene the Comprehensive Plan process, so we have a say... Our future depends on it.

Coffey, Darren. “Planning for Utility-Scale Solar Energy Facilities.” American Planning Association, September/October 2019