



THE SAN MARCOS ASSOCIATION

P.O. Box 722

Cerrillos, NM 87010

<https://thesanmarcosassociation.org/>

Commissioner <<name>>, Santa Fe County District #
Santa Fe County, New Mexico
[<<email>>](mailto:) - via email

Dear Commissioner <<name>>:

The San Marcos Association (SMA) (<https://thesanmarcosassociation.org/>) is a non-profit community service organization (IRS Code 501(c)(4)), and a Registered Organization under Chapter 2 of the Sustainable Land Development Code of Santa Fe County. Our goals are to protect the rural, residential character of the area for which we advocate; to monitor development to see that it is consistent with that character and with applicable plans and ordinances of Santa Fe County; and to advocate on behalf of property owners/residents of the area in matters of public service, utilities and the general welfare of people. SMA's area of advocacy includes much of the western Galisteo Basin and properties east and west of HWY 14 from Rancho San Marcos north to the HWY 599 Relief Route. Portions of Districts 3 and 5 lie in our area.

At least two (2) national companies have proposed building community and utility-scale solar installations in this part of Santa Fe County. Given the stated interest on the part of the solar industry in this area, and the national focus on increasing carbon-neutral sources of energy, it is reasonable to assume that more renewable energy projects will be proposed in the County. Therefore, the Board of Directors of The San Marcos Association respectfully requests the Board of County Commissioners to strongly consider modifying §11.4 of the Sustainable Land Development Code to designate Utility-Scale Renewable Energy Projects – projects that include, but are not limited to, solar and wind – as Developments of Countywide Impact (DCIs). If so designated, Utility-Scale Renewable Energy Projects would then be subject to regulations and enforcement mechanisms set forth elsewhere in Chapter 11 and in an additional section (e.g., §11.15) dedicated to such projects. These revisions should detail world class regulatory specifications for such projects and should incorporate language allowing for projects employing yet to be developed renewable energy technologies to be designated as DCIs in the future. We also feel that, in the case of large-scale renewable energy projects, all residents, landowners, Registered Organizations and Community Organizations in Santa Fe County should be notified of pertinent meetings. This is a much broader segment of the County than provided for in §11.5.5.

SMA feels that Utility-Scale Renewable Energy Projects should be designated as DCIs, with attendant changes to the SLDC, for several reasons. An important one is the sheer scale of these projects. Utility-scale renewable installations occupy, and impact far more extensive acreages than do traditional power plants. With footprints on the order of hundreds of acres; renewable energy installations can be far larger than many residential developments. Projects of such size will have long-lasting impacts on the landscape – including affecting surface water flow patterns and reducing the space available for wildlife. They will also measurably affect the County finances over the next few decades. Any development of such size will unavoidably affect local quality of life in

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many ways – predictable and unpredictable. Designating these large-scale utility projects as DCIs will allow for greater public input into their potential approval and more opportunities to discuss those quality-of-life issues.

Large scale utility installations involve many developing technologies, technologies whose potentials and risks should be clearly communicated to the countywide public. Language providing for explicit regulation of these technologies, based upon world-class standards, should be included in the SLDC. For example, if a renewable energy installation maintains a battery energy storage system (BESS) to save electricity for times when nature does not permit power generation, those systems come with a small, but real, fire danger. Creating DCI Overlay Zoning Districts for these large utility projects would foster public input into the discussion of risks such as this, highlight appropriate regulatory standards, and promote public education into the likelihood of such an industrial accident occurring. Proactively regulating these technologies, and communicating those regulations to all parties, will help create an environment where the community understands its connection to these enterprises.

Utility-Scale Renewable Energy Projects may impact future development in a variety of ways – perhaps by attracting development that strains local resources, or by curtailing planned development. However, they may also promote a flourishing of clean energy businesses; attract energy-related high-tech companies and job opportunities; or entail lower demands on water and road infrastructure relative to building the maximum allowable number of homes and businesses on that same acreage. Analyzing the scale of these impacts and the countywide risks/benefits associated with them will be a more fruitful endeavor with the increased public input connected with a DCI designation for these projects.

Officials in Santa Fe County have a responsibility to act as stewards of this region, and to ensure that our local communities benefit from development in tangible ways. Though projects such as these solar installations are touted as having numerous benefits, there are also costs associated with them. Ensuring that costs are minimized or mitigated, and are weighed against benefits, are analyses that all county residents have a right to expect. The Board of County Commissioners has already taken action to regulate Community Solar Projects in the County (e.g., §10.25 of the SLDC); large scale renewable energy projects warrant the same attention.

We thank you for your consideration of this matter. The San Marcos Association looks forward to a continuing dialog concerning these issues.

Sincerely,



Dennis Kurtz, President
The San Marcos Association

Cc: All Santa Fe County Commissioners and Constituent Service Liaisons
Penny Ellis-Green, Director – Growth Management Administration, Santa Fe County
Jacqueline Beam - Sustainability Manager, Santa Fe County

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