

HEATHER BOWMAN
HAMILTON COUNTY CLERK & RECORDER

**MINUTES OF THE PUBLIC HEARING FOR SOLAR AND WIND
ORDINANCE UPDATES HELD ON:
MAY 27, 2026**

The Hamilton County Board convened at the Hamilton County Courthouse in the City of McLeansboro, State of Illinois, on Wednesday the 27th day of May, at 6:00 p.m. and was called to order by Chairman Kelly Woodrow.

On roll call, the following Board members responded as being present, which represented a quorum: Kelly Woodrow, John Mead, Adam Little, John Carrell, and Landon Vaughan.

Chairman Woodrow turned the meeting over to Dustin Harmon and Justin Greeley, both with Bellwether Administrative Services. Justin reviewed the reasons for the public hearing, which included making updates to the county's solar and wind ordinances, to reserve the county's ability to have local ordinances, and to gather comments from the public. He then reviewed a slideshow of information with the board and the members of the public that covered the required changes in SB25, noting that the overall idea was that the counties could no longer be more restrictive than the state. Chairman Woodrow asked about the initial escrow/bond amount and what other counties were doing. Dustin Harmon said they were no longer allowed to have that option and that a bond was now the standard requirement. However, he did note that there is current independent legal action against the state for that change.

Chairman Woodrow then asked if anyone from the public would like to comment. Eileen Hall expressed concerns about the impact to animals and long-term effects for the residents. Justin Greeley assured her that a wildlife study is one of the requirements. Mrs. Hall said she was against it altogether. Justin said from his understanding, the county does not have any solar or wind farms at this time. The board agreed. Chairman Woodrow reminded Eileen that the state was not coming in to take the ground; that the local land owners would be choosing to lease it. He also noted that the board was planning to place the maximum restrictions that were allowed by the state. Next, Mary Anne Hopfinger asked how many acres would be affected. Dustin Harmon noted that they have no applications at this time. Landon Vaughan reiterated again that they were making the guidelines as strict as they possibly could, without putting the county in jeopardy of litigation. He explained that the state appeal board was handpicked by the same people that created the legislation. John Mead added that the existing ordinance was stricter for that reason, but the state was forcing them to change it. Landon asked Dustin about the reimbursement fees that the county was allowed to collect for external review and if that was in addition to or subtracted from the maximum fee. Dustin confirmed that they were allowed to collect this amount for reimbursement in addition to the maximum fee, as long as it was a reasonable amount. Dorothy Smith asked what the county would get out of the deal. Justin said they would get to keep local control over fencing, road use permits, etc. She then asked who would get to use the energy created. Justin said it would be strictly commercial use for their own resale. Property taxes were also discussed. Dustin said the state sets the assessment rate for property taxes. It was explained that the increase to the County's EAV would shift some of the tax burden away from the individual tax payers to energy facility owners. Last, Dorothy asked about the underground stabilization of the wind and solar facilities and how that may effect farming down the road. Chairman Woodrow explained what he knew about the wind turbines and noted that the underground concrete was covered with 5ft of backfill, allowing them to continue farming the ground. Jerry Prince said many of the wind/solar leasing personnel talked like the schools would get more money. Moving on, Chairman Woodrow explained to the public that most of the leases taken out with the property owners already include language that meets state guidelines. Dustin Harmon also added that the land owners can make the leases more restrictive than the county can. Nicole Behnke, in attendance for WRUL, said she recommended the board learn from White County's mistakes. She explained that Ameren built some solar panels around a residence in their county and has failed to keep up the maintenance. Nicole said the County is now having a hard time reaching someone with Ameren to get it cleaned up. She recommended getting the ordinance "down pat and ready". Some members of the public were asking where some of the potential sites are, however, Chairman Woodrow said they wouldn't know for

sure until they file a permit. State’s Attorney Sarah Mead said they will likely need to be close to a power source. John Carrell agreed and said he thought they would be staying close to the big transmission lines. There were a few off-subject questions regarding activity out by the old coal mine, data centers, and the pavement of Rual Hills rd. Last, Landon asked Bellwether to confirm that the solar/wind companies would have to notify the county of any acquisition. State’s Attorney Sarah Mead confirmed. Justin Greeley noted that there are companies who handle all permitting and set up, just to sell off to another company to save them a step. Chairman Woodrow confirmed there were no other public comments before closing the meeting.

MOTION was made by John Carrell, seconded by Adam Little to adjourn the meeting. Vote by acclamation. All voting aye, none nay. Motion carried.

MINUTES APPROVED ON:_____

COUNTY CLERK

CHAIRMAN