

Proposed solar farm would be IW's largest

By Stephen Faleski
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A new solar farm proposed at the border of Isle of Wight and Surry counties would be Isle of Wight's ninth, and largest.

Sycamore Cross Solar LLC, a subsidiary of Arlington-based

AES Corp., has applied for a "certificate of public convenience and necessity" from the State Corporation Commission for a 2,844-acre solar farm, though only 1,156 acres would see fencing and solar panels.

The project would be located at Sycamore Cross Drive at the

westernmost edge of the Isle of Wight-Surry border.

Virginia law mandates solar farms that generate electricity in excess of five megawatts demonstrate to the state that the project "is not contrary to the public interest." Sycamore Cross would generate 240 mega-

watts.

The project, according to a public notice set for publication in the Sept. 6 edition of *The Smithfield Times*, would span the Isle of Wight-Surry border. According to AES spokeswoman Amy Lobel, 2,036 acres would be on the Isle of Wight side.

Plans for Sycamore Cross have been in the works since at least December when land transfer records filed at the Isle of Wight County Courthouse showed Blue Sky Endeavors, another subsidiary of AES, as

• **See SOLAR, p. 8**

Solar

• Continued from p. 1

having purchased roughly 1,700 acres at the project site for \$12.1 million that month.

AES submitted Sycamore Cross's formal application for a conditional use permit on April 19.

The requested permit is separate from the state certificate. The permit is the purview of Isle of Wight's Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors, which will each hold a public hearing and vote on the matter.

According to Lobel, Sycamore Cross's permit application is still being reviewed by Isle of Wight's Community Development Department. As such, no hearing dates have been set yet.

AES is the same devel-

oper behind the 1,750-acre Cavalier Solar project, roughly 500 acres of which span into Isle of Wight. Surry and Isle of Wight supervisors each approved their portions of the Cavalier project in 2021.

The largest solar farms Isle of Wight has approved to date are the 637-acre Carver project that will span both sides of Route 460 between Windsor and Zuni, and an adjacent 630-acre solar farm designated Windsor PV1.

According to the scheduled Sept. 6 public notice, Sycamore Cross would connect to a Dominion substation on Mill Swamp Road approximately 4½ miles away, near the Cavalier site.

When Isle of Wight's su-

perisors approved Carver in August as the county's eighth, Supervisor Dick Grice said he hoped it would be "one of the very last." Grice, who isn't running for reelection this November, joined with the majority in a 4-1 May vote to limit the cumulative acreage of existing and proposed solar farms to 2% of the county's prime farmland, or 2,446 acres.

The eight approved projects, according to county data, will collectively occupy 2,208 acres of prime soil, or 1.8%.

Community Development Director Amy Ring, however, said in May that the 2% cap would not apply to any project that had filed a conditional use permit application prior to

the date of the near-moratorium's adoption.

Ring said as of August the county had received five pending solar farm applications, including Sycamore Cross.

The State Corporation Commission has set a Nov. 30, 10 a.m. hearing on Sycamore Cross's requested certificate. Those wishing to speak at the hearing by phone are to, by Nov. 21, provide their names and phone numbers on a form available at scc.virginia.gov/pages/Webcasting or by completing and emailing a PDF version of the form to SCCInfo@scc.virginia.gov. Speakers can also register for the hearing by calling 804-371-9141.