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September 14, 2020
President Richard Valle and
Alameda County Board of Supervisors
1221 Oak Street Oakland, California 94612

RE: Request for a September 22 Discussion Item on Solar Policies and Development

Dear President Valle and Alameda County Supervisors:

We represent Save North Livermore Valley (SNLV), comprised of hundreds of landowners, environmentalists, and Alameda County residents. We request that the Board place a discussion item on its September 22, 2020 agenda regarding solar energy facilities and related policies.

Applications have been submitted for two massive solar projects in scenic East County and we would like to discuss alternatives for reviewing these and future solar developments. In 2011-12 the Board directed staff to complete policies for locating large-scale solar facilities in rural areas and to use those policies to amend the County General Plan and Zoning Ordinance. Unfortunately, those important tasks were never completed.

On Sept. 8, the Board's Transportation-Planning Committee rejected a request from the Alameda County Agricultural Committee, SNLV, the City of Livermore, and others to complete a rural solar study and general plan amendment prior to staff finalizing the two proposals for hundreds of acres of solar panels in North Livermore Valley. Without any apparent authority to do so, Supervisor Scott Haggerty stated that policy work (started in 2011) could proceed, but that no solar policy would "apply to things that are already in the pipe."

Supervisor Haggerty's position is counter to the full Board's direction on Feb. 28, 2012, when reviewing the Cool Earth project. The Board clearly directed staff to complete solar policies before reviewing any more projects.

Given the Board's 2012 direction to staff that the policies should be completed before staff reviewed additional solar projects, we believe that the full Board must revisit this issue. Supervisors have long recognized the urgent need for renewable energy, and we fully support solar power. But as County statements over the past decade make clear, the development of renewal energy should not come at the expense of the natural environment.

The County has highlighted potential conflicts between renewable energy and the natural environment and stated that policies would help eliminate such conflicts by providing direction to solar developers and others. Tensions around the two North Livermore Valley projects present the very type of conflict the County sought to avoid.

Alternatives include, but are not limited to the following: placing a timeline on completing, 1) rural solar development policies and a 2) a general plan amendment; processing projects currently under review on a schedule that would allow for completed rural solar policies to apply to the projects; placing a temporary moratorium on any rural solar projects until the policies and/or general plan amendment can be completed.

We hope that our request for a discussion on rural Alameda County solar can help create a path forward that boosts renewable energy while protecting the natural environment and avoiding conflict. We await your response.

Sincerely,

Robert W. Selna, on behalf of Save North Livermore Valley