

Topaz Solar Farm's placement is debated

Aaron Crutchfield, Atascadero News, 5-3-11

Which option is best for the proposed 550-megawatt Topaz Solar Farm: having it straddle Highway 58, avoiding protected farmland but producing more visual impact and a possible driving hazard from glare, or having it north of the highway, making less visual impact but breaking farmland contracts under the Williamson Act?

This is the question the San Luis Obispo County Planning Commission pondered at its meeting last Thursday as Topaz Solar Farm makes its way through the approval process. Commissioners Dan O'Grady and Jim Irving supported the more northerly option, while commissioners Carlyn Christianson and Ken Topping favored the southern option.

Commissioner Tim Murphy, a potential tiebreaker, was absent.

The two sides argued the placement, sometimes getting a bit heated.

O'Grady, an Atascadero resident, said the northern alignment would keep the solar panels a half-mile away from the highway and Carrisa Plains Elementary School, reducing the visual impact and reducing the potential for glare hitting drivers' eyes.