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## HOUSE BILL NO. 656

Offered January 8, 2020

Prefiled January 6, 2020

A BILL to amend and reenact § 15.2-2286 of the Code of Virginia, relating to solar energy projects; national standards.

Patrons—Heretick and Carroll Foy

Referred to Committee on Agriculture, Chesapeake and Natural Resources

**Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:**

**1. That § 15.2-2286 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted as follows:**

**§ 15.2-2286. Permitted provisions in zoning ordinances; amendments; applicant to pay delinquent taxes; penalties.**

A. A zoning ordinance may include, among other things, reasonable regulations and provisions as to any or all of the following matters:

1. For variances or special exceptions, as defined in § 15.2-2201, to the general regulations in any district.

2. For the temporary application of the ordinance to any property coming into the territorial jurisdiction of the governing body by annexation or otherwise, subsequent to the adoption of the zoning ordinance, and pending the orderly amendment of the ordinance.

3. For the granting of special exceptions under suitable regulations and safeguards; notwithstanding any other provisions of this article, the governing body of any locality may reserve unto itself the right to issue such special exceptions. Conditions imposed in connection with residential special use permits, wherein the applicant proposes affordable housing, shall be consistent with the objective of providing affordable housing. When imposing conditions on residential projects specifying materials and methods of construction or specific design features, the approving body shall consider the impact of the conditions upon the affordability of housing.

The governing body or the board of zoning appeals of the City of Norfolk may impose a condition upon any special exception relating to retail alcoholic beverage control licensees which provides that such special exception will automatically expire upon a change of ownership of the property, a change in possession, a change in the operation or management of a facility or upon the passage of a specific period of time.

The governing body of the City of Richmond may impose a condition upon any special use permit issued after July 1, 2000, relating to retail alcoholic beverage licensees which provides that such special use permit shall be subject to an automatic review by the governing body upon a change in possession, a change in the owner of the business, or a transfer of majority control of the business entity. Upon review by the governing body, it may either amend or revoke the special use permit after notice and a public hearing as required by § 15.2-2206.

4. For the administration and enforcement of the ordinance including the appointment or designation of a zoning administrator who may also hold another office in the locality. The zoning administrator shall have all necessary authority on behalf of the governing body to administer and enforce the zoning ordinance. His authority shall include (i) ordering in writing the remedying of any condition found in violation of the ordinance; (ii) insuring compliance with the ordinance, bringing legal action, including injunction, abatement, or other appropriate action or proceeding subject to appeal pursuant to § 15.2-2311; and (iii) in specific cases, making findings of fact and, with concurrence of the attorney for the governing body, conclusions of law regarding determinations of rights accruing under § 15.2-2307 or subsection C of § 15.2-2311.

Whenever the zoning administrator has reasonable cause to believe that any person has engaged in or is engaging in any violation of a zoning ordinance that limits occupancy in a residential dwelling unit, which is subject to a civil penalty that may be imposed in accordance with the provisions of § 15.2-2209, and the zoning administrator, after a good faith effort to obtain the data or information necessary to determine whether a violation has occurred, has been unable to obtain such information, he may request that the attorney for the locality petition the judge of the general district court for his jurisdiction for a subpoena duces tecum against any such person refusing to produce such data or information. The judge of the court, upon good cause shown, may cause the subpoena to be issued. Any person failing to comply with such subpoena shall be subject to punishment for contempt by the court issuing the subpoena. Any person so subpoenaed may apply to the judge who issued the subpoena to quash it.

INTRODUCED

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59 Notwithstanding the provisions of § 15.2-2311, a zoning ordinance may prescribe an appeal period of  
60 less than 30 days, but not less than 10 days, for a notice of violation involving temporary or seasonal  
61 commercial uses, parking of commercial trucks in residential zoning districts, maximum occupancy  
62 limitations of a residential dwelling unit, or similar short-term, recurring violations.

63 Where provided by ordinance, the zoning administrator may be authorized to grant a modification  
64 from any provision contained in the zoning ordinance with respect to physical requirements on a lot or  
65 parcel of land, including but not limited to size, height, location or features of or related to any building,  
66 structure, or improvements, if the administrator finds in writing that: (i) the strict application of the  
67 ordinance would produce undue hardship; (ii) such hardship is not shared generally by other properties  
68 in the same zoning district and the same vicinity; and (iii) the authorization of the modification will not  
69 be of substantial detriment to adjacent property and the character of the zoning district will not be  
70 changed by the granting of the modification. Prior to the granting of a modification, the zoning  
71 administrator shall give, or require the applicant to give, all adjoining property owners written notice of  
72 the request for modification, and an opportunity to respond to the request within 21 days of the date of  
73 the notice. The zoning administrator shall make a decision on the application for modification and issue  
74 a written decision with a copy provided to the applicant and any adjoining landowner who responded in  
75 writing to the notice sent pursuant to this paragraph. The decision of the zoning administrator shall  
76 constitute a decision within the purview of § 15.2-2311, and may be appealed to the board of zoning  
77 appeals as provided by that section. Decisions of the board of zoning appeals may be appealed to the  
78 circuit court as provided by § 15.2-2314.

79 The zoning administrator shall respond within 90 days of a request for a decision or determination  
80 on zoning matters within the scope of his authority unless the requester has agreed to a longer period.

81 5. For the imposition of penalties upon conviction of any violation of the zoning ordinance. Any  
82 such violation shall be a misdemeanor punishable by a fine of not more than \$1,000. If the violation is  
83 uncorrected at the time of the conviction, the court shall order the violator to abate or remedy the  
84 violation in compliance with the zoning ordinance, within a time period established by the court. Failure  
85 to remove or abate a zoning violation within the specified time period shall constitute a separate  
86 misdemeanor offense punishable by a fine of not more than \$1,000; any such failure during a  
87 succeeding 10-day period shall constitute a separate misdemeanor offense punishable by a fine of not  
88 more than \$1,500; and any such failure during any succeeding 10-day period shall constitute a separate  
89 misdemeanor offense for each 10-day period punishable by a fine of not more than \$2,000.

90 However, any conviction resulting from a violation of provisions regulating the number of unrelated  
91 persons in single-family residential dwellings shall be punishable by a fine of up to \$2,000. Failure to  
92 abate the violation within the specified time period shall be punishable by a fine of up to \$5,000, and  
93 any such failure during any succeeding 10-day period shall constitute a separate misdemeanor offense  
94 for each 10-day period punishable by a fine of up to \$7,500. However, no such fine shall accrue against  
95 an owner or managing agent of a single-family residential dwelling unit during the pendency of any  
96 legal action commenced by such owner or managing agent of such dwelling unit against a tenant to  
97 eliminate an overcrowding condition in accordance with the Virginia Residential Landlord and Tenant  
98 Act (§ 55.1-1200 et seq.). A conviction resulting from a violation of provisions regulating the number of  
99 unrelated persons in single-family residential dwellings shall not be punishable by a jail term.

100 6. For the collection of fees to cover the cost of making inspections, issuing permits, advertising of  
101 notices and other expenses incident to the administration of a zoning ordinance or to the filing or  
102 processing of any appeal or amendment thereto.

103 7. For the amendment of the regulations or district maps from time to time, or for their repeal.  
104 Whenever the public necessity, convenience, general welfare, or good zoning practice requires, the  
105 governing body may by ordinance amend, supplement, or change the regulations, district boundaries, or  
106 classifications of property. Any such amendment may be initiated (i) by resolution of the governing  
107 body; (ii) by motion of the local planning commission; or (iii) by petition of the owner, contract  
108 purchaser with the owner's written consent, or the owner's agent therefor, of the property which is the  
109 subject of the proposed zoning map amendment, addressed to the governing body or the local planning  
110 commission, who shall forward such petition to the governing body; however, the ordinance may  
111 provide for the consideration of proposed amendments only at specified intervals of time, and may  
112 further provide that substantially the same petition will not be reconsidered within a specific period, not  
113 exceeding one year. Any such resolution or motion by such governing body or commission proposing  
114 the rezoning shall state the above public purposes therefor.

115 In any county having adopted such zoning ordinance, all motions, resolutions or petitions for  
116 amendment to the zoning ordinance, and/or map shall be acted upon and a decision made within such  
117 reasonable time as may be necessary which shall not exceed 12 months unless the applicant requests or  
118 consents to action beyond such period or unless the applicant withdraws his motion, resolution or  
119 petition for amendment to the zoning ordinance or map, or both. In the event of and upon such  
120 withdrawal, processing of the motion, resolution or petition shall cease without further action as

otherwise would be required by this subdivision.

8. For the submission and approval of a plan of development prior to the issuance of building permits to assure compliance with regulations contained in such zoning ordinance.

9. For areas and districts designated for mixed use developments or planned unit developments as defined in § 15.2-2201.

10. For the administration of incentive zoning as defined in § 15.2-2201.

11. For provisions allowing the locality to enter into a voluntary agreement with a landowner that would result in the downzoning of the landowner's undeveloped or underdeveloped property in exchange for a tax credit equal to the amount of excess real estate taxes that the landowner has paid due to the higher zoning classification. The locality may establish reasonable guidelines for determining the amount of excess real estate tax collected and the method and duration for applying the tax credit. For purposes of this section, "downzoning" means a zoning action by a locality that results in a reduction in a formerly permitted land use intensity or density.

12. Provisions for requiring and considering Phase I environmental site assessments based on the anticipated use of the property proposed for the subdivision or development that meet generally accepted national standards for such assessments, such as those developed by the American Society for Testing and Materials, and Phase II environmental site assessments, that also meet accepted national standards, such as, but not limited to, those developed by the American Society for Testing and Materials, if the locality deems such to be reasonably necessary, based on findings in the Phase I assessment, and in accordance with regulations of the United States Environmental Protection Agency and the American Society for Testing and Materials. A reasonable fee may be charged for the review of such environmental assessments. Such fees shall not exceed an amount commensurate with the services rendered, taking into consideration the time, skill, and administrative expense involved in such review.

*13. Provisions to incorporate generally accepted national standards for the use of solar panels and battery technologies for solar photovoltaic (electric energy) projects such as those developed for existing product certifications and standards, including NSF/ANSI 457, International Standard IEC 61215, International Standard IEC 61646, and UL 61703.*

14. Provisions for requiring disclosure and remediation of contamination and other adverse environmental conditions of the property prior to approval of subdivision and development plans.

~~14.~~ 15. For the enforcement of provisions of the zoning ordinance that regulate the number of persons permitted to occupy a single-family residential dwelling unit, provided such enforcement is in compliance with applicable local, state and federal fair housing laws.

~~15.~~ 16. For the issuance of inspection warrants by a magistrate or court of competent jurisdiction. The zoning administrator or his agent may make an affidavit under oath before a magistrate or court of competent jurisdiction and, if such affidavit establishes probable cause that a zoning ordinance violation has occurred, request that the magistrate or court grant the zoning administrator or his agent an inspection warrant to enable the zoning administrator or his agent to enter the subject dwelling for the purpose of determining whether violations of the zoning ordinance exist. After issuing a warrant under this section, the magistrate or judge shall file the affidavit in the manner prescribed by § 19.2-54. After executing the warrant, the zoning administrator or his agents shall return the warrant to the clerk of the circuit court of the city or county wherein the inspection was made. The zoning administrator or his agent shall make a reasonable effort to obtain consent from the owner or tenant of the subject dwelling prior to seeking the issuance of an inspection warrant under this section.

B. Prior to the initiation of an application by the owner of the subject property, the owner's agent, or any entity in which the owner holds an ownership interest greater than 50 percent, for a special exception, special use permit, variance, rezoning or other land disturbing permit, including building permits and erosion and sediment control permits, or prior to the issuance of final approval, the authorizing body may require the applicant to produce satisfactory evidence that any delinquent real estate taxes, nuisance charges, stormwater management utility fees, and any other charges that constitute a lien on the subject property, that are owed to the locality and have been properly assessed against the subject property, have been paid, unless otherwise authorized by the treasurer.

**2. That the generally accepted national standards for the use of solar panels and battery technologies for solar photovoltaic (electric energy) projects applicable pursuant to § 15.2-2286 of the Code of Virginia, as amended by this act, shall apply to any solar photovoltaic (electric energy) projects in the Commonwealth, notwithstanding any other provision of law, general or special.**