

MINUTES OF THE LIVINGSTON COUNTY
REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
HELD ON AUGUST 27, 2018, STARTING AT 7:00 PM
IN THE LIVINGSTON COUNTY HISTORIC COURTHOUSE
112 W. MADISON ST. PONTIAC, ILLINOIS

Chairman Mike Haberkorn, called the meeting to order and roll call was taken.

Those present were: Jerry Gaspardo, Michael Haberkorn, Rudy Piskule, Eddie Hoerner, Verne Taylor, Dee Woodburn, Scott Sand, Shane Long, Scott Cranford and John Slagel

Those absent were: Eddie Hoerner, Keith Bahler and Dean Wahls.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA:

Chairman Haberkorn mentioned the agenda to this meeting. With no recommendations for additions or amendments to the agenda for this August 27, 2018 meeting, Dee Woodburn moved, seconded by Shane Long, that the agenda for this meeting be approved as presented. This motion was unanimously approved by voice vote.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Minutes of the July 30, 2018 meetings were mentioned by Chairman Haberkorn. John Slagel then moved, seconded by Scott Cranford, that these minutes be approved as presented. This motion was unanimously approved by voice vote.

BUSINESS:

Cases SU-9-18 & SU-10-18 – Vermilion Solar I and Vermilion Solar II

These zoning cases pertain to two adjoining propose solar farm special use proposals, to be located in Section 36 of Pontiac Township. Ric Ahern of Vermilion Solar LLC, addressed the planning commission members as a representative of the applicant. Mr. Ahern related that the total acreage of around 43 acres is proposed for two 2 megawatt solar farms, under the Illinois Power Agency's program for solar farm. The power from these solar farms is intended to be subscribed for from residents within the Com Ed territory. Mr. Ahern commented about how the area is now row crop with some low land areas near the property, to the north and east has areas in a flood plain area. Mr. Ahern then reviewed the application and reports. Mr. Ahern explained about how they had worked with the property owner Mr. Ledford and his son as to what part of the property they would find appropriate for the proposed solar farm site. These discussions included what property to use, drainage tile locations, and the power lines in the former rail road property. This parcel was selected to meet the proposed use. Mr. Ahern continued in that this would be a limited lifetime use, with a lease of about 30 years, after which the land would be returned to farmable Ag status. Mr. Ahern then went through the application binder, including comments of burying onsite power lines, except for the grid connection line.

The acreage of 43 acres was discussed, and then maximum height of the proposed tracking solar panels was discussed. A proposed 8 foot tall wildlife fence is being proposed to surround the site. The fence is designed as a barrier to keep intruders out. The noise level will not exceed more than 50 decibels at the property line, in that the noise will be kept within 150 feet. Glare will be controlled by absorbing the sun, not reflecting it. Signage will be provided. Storm water management was discussed, in that under normal rain amounts they plan to control the rain on the property, with the use of their ground cover, of rye grass, and pollinator plants on the perimeter. Mr. Ahern mentioned more intense maintenance would be need in the first two three years. No hazardous materials will be on this proposed site. Mr. Ahern noted that the land is restored to Ag production at the end of the lease. The decommissioning plan was then remarked about, including a bond. They do not anticipate any negative impact on the environment. They plan on using best management practices in controlling dust during construction, and maintaining the property. They plan on hydro seeding the site at the end of the construction process. Almost all of the materials to be used are recyclable in the end.

Mr. Ahern was then open to questions. The planning commission inquired as to why this is proposed as two projects and not one. Mr. Ahern replied that it is proposed this way to meet the Illinois Power Agency requirements, for community solar gardens or projects. These requirements allow for 2 megawatt sites, while allow for 2 sites to be co-located. Mr. Ahern noted the application period for the state is to be around January 19th, and he further commented about the application process and a lottery process to approve. Mr. Ahern anticipates more applications will be submitted than for available megawatts available. How the future projects to be part of this program are to be approved is unknown. Mr. Ahern responded that they have 4 other proposed projects in Illinois similar to this proposal. Mr. Ahern answered that Livingston County was chosen because of it having more rural areas, and the availability of the line for the interconnect. They look at the same things that farmers do, including soil conditions. Soil borings are done as part of the due diligence for the project. Mr. Ahern then responded about the fencing, by giving more detailed explanation of the proposed woven wire fence, with wooden posts. A living screened is not being proposed for this site, since it is more isolated on low travelled township roads, as opposed to state highways. Mr. Ahern explained how the pollinator plants will be put in the border areas. Area residences use was discussed. The presence of the property owners and neighbors was noted. Plans to continue farming the edges in row crops was discussed. The only concrete planned would be the pad under the inverters. The type of fencing was discussed in comparison to cyclone fencing. Mr. Ahern noted that if someone wants in fence area, they can get in. Mr. Ahern remarked that their main goal is to keep the deer out. Mr. Ahern noted that hit would be hard to be electrocuted with the safety factors built into the development. Mr. Ahern mentioned how system operators are notified when the power outage goes down unexpectedly. Mr. Ahern indicated that no building would be part of this proposed development. Mr. Ahern commented about the power line they plan on tying into, with the inverter being close to this transmission line. Each project would have its' own inverter. Mr. Ahern explained about the inverters proposed to be used. Mr. Ahern then commented about the revised site plan, that reflects a project area as opposed to two project sites. So if both projects are not selected in the state program lottery, this allows for them to move to the best area if only one site is selected, as noted on the general note on this information page. The company control center operator, will be contracted out with a possible office in the Chicago area. Mr. Ahern commented about how the control centers operate.

The regional planning commission members were presented with the comprehensive plan check list pages. Copies of past conditions that have been part of county board approval were also presented to planning commission members. A new condition related to the state agriculture mitigation agreement may be added, in that a copy of this application be provided to the county. The type of fencing was discussed. The comprehensive plan checklist was reviewed by the planning commission members. The planning commission members agreed with the previous comments made to these checklist questions. Scott Cranford moved, seconded by Jerry Gaspardo, to recommend the approval of both Livingston County Zoning Cases SU-9-18 and SU-10-18 , Vermilion Solar I and Vermilion Solar II. This motion was approved by a unanimous voice vote.

Case ZT-1-18 – This zoning case pertains to an amended proposed zoning text amendment to clarify in what zoning districts solar farms are considered as special uses. New definitions and a potential change in the fence height have been added, as noted when the zoning administrator presented his report relative to this zoning case, regarding limiting solar farms as special uses in AG, Agriculture, Districts and I2, General Industrial, Districts. Fencing type and height was discussed. The consensus of the Livingston County Regional Planning Commission members was to recommend the approval of Livingston County Zoning Case ZT-1-18 as it is being proposed and amended.

OTHER BUSINESS:

Limiting the number of total acres on which solar farms can be developed was discussed, with the potential to limiting the development of solar farms to a quarter section in each township in Livingston County. This would amount to 4800 acres, which would be at least 120 solar farms. Reasoning for this proposal is to work towards protecting farm land, and to spread solar farm development out throughout the county. The planning commission agreed to discuss this further at future meetings.

PUBLIC COMMENT: None

INFORMATIONAL UPDATE:

The planning commission members were informed that Livingston County Zoning Case SU-8-18 – Sember – had been approved by the zoning board of appeals, with conditions as a club or lodge and as a private recreational enterprise.

The planning commission members present were informed that their next meeting is scheduled for Monday October the 1st. at 7:00 pm.

ADJOURNMENT:

Jerry Gaspardo moved, seconded by Rudy Piskule, that the meeting be adjourned. This motion was unanimously approved.

This meeting was then adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Charles T. Schopp, Secretary
Livingston County Regional
Planning Commission