

MINUTES  
LIVINGSTON COUNTY ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS  
Livingston County Historic Courthouse  
112 W. Madison St., Pontiac, Illinois

Recessed Meeting  
6:00 p.m.

May 31, 2023

The meeting came to order at 6:23 p.m.

Members Present: Joe Stock, Richard Kiefer, Joan Huisman, William Flott, and Neil Turner

Others Present: Zoning Administrator Jesse King, Assistant Zoning Administrator Trish Merlino, Attorney Seth Uphoff, Micah Fuchs (Competitive Power Ventures), Kyle Adams (PLANIT), Dr. Chris Ollson, Dr. Clay Robsinson, Dr. David Loomis, Jason Dixon, Joe Stahl, and Julie Russow

Members Absent: Richard Runyon and Dave Randolph

Chair Huisman announced the reconvened April 6, 2023 meeting at 6:23 p.m.

**Business to be reviewed:**

**Case SU-13-22 – Prairie Dock Solar**

Uphoff began the meeting by giving a recap of what was covered in the prior hearing on April 27<sup>th</sup>.

Fuchs then gave a detailed presentation on all of the setbacks for the project by breaking the project down into sections with graphics that displayed minimum setbacks compared with the project's actual setbacks. Uphoff and Fuchs then went back through the setbacks and demonstrated compliance with all minimum required setbacks. There was then a question about a part of the graphic that appeared to be in conflict with the displayed setback lines. Fuchs and Uphoff explained that it was an engineering error when creating the display that they had not noticed before. Another question was asked about whether the setback distances were to the fence or to the solar panels. The applicants clarified that it was measured to the fence.

Adams, a landscaping architect, was then introduced by Uphoff. Adams began by introducing himself which included his education and experience in his field of expertise. Uphoff then questioned Adams about the process of creating a plan for landscaping. Adams explained that the selection of greenery depends on what currently exists in the area. There was further discussion about how to determine what level of screening is necessary for particular viewing areas and where the trees and other greenery would be sourced from. Adams related that they typically try to source their greenery from local nurseries.

Uphoff then talked through some renderings added to real photos that were created by Adams that showed what different areas of the project would look like without a living buffer compared to what it would look like with the buffer 10 years into growth.

Uphoff then introduced Robinson as his next witness. Robinson introduced himself as an expert in soil analysis and described his education and experience. Uphoff then went on to question Robinson about the process of putting together the soil report for this project. They then began discussing the results of Robinson's findings which determined that about a third of the soil in the project area have some degree of erosion and that only about 16% of the soils within the project area are considered "Prime Farmland". Robinson then began describing the benefits that a project like this would have on the soil which included less erosion, runoff, phosphorus loading, and nitrate leaching. Additionally, Robinson stated that this project would increase biodiversity, provide a habitat for pollinators and insects, as well as significantly increase the soil organic matter which would significantly improve the soil's health and productivity. Robinson then stated that once the project is decommissioned, the soil will return to production levels not seen since the ground was in prairie sod back in the 1800's.

Dixon then asked Robinson if there are measurements from the 1800's to compare with that would corroborate his claim. Robinson replied that there are not, but there is still a small percentage of prairie lands that exist of which can be measured, that experts do use for sampling. Dixon then asked if Robinson tested for contaminants in the soil. Robinson stated that he only tested the soil quality. Lastly, Dixon asked whether or not there were any water tests done in the area. Robinson stated that he did not test the water because he was not asked to do so, but that it could be done.

Uphoff then introduced Ollson as his next witness. Ollson began by introducing himself as a health & safety expert along with his education and experience. Ollson then began by addressing common health concerns that are raised with regard to solar farms which included EMF, stray voltage, metals in solar panels, glare, sound, and fire. Ollson stated that the amount of EMF (electromagnetic fields) in solar farms is about equivalent to what is emitted within a normal household and that they do not pose any health danger. Ollson then explained that these projects are properly engineered and constructed that stray voltage should not occur and that stray voltage is not a human health issue. Next, Ollson addressed metals in solar panels and stated that nothing will leach from the panels as the metals are securely in place within the panels and that there are multiple layers of protection. Ollson added that the panels are not a threat to soil or water and that tests and studies have been done to confirm that. Ollson then described the progression of solar panels to this date and explained that they used to be a concern for glare, but are no longer as the FAA has loosened their restrictions on them because they are not a hazard. Ollson then talked about noise in solar farms which come from the inverters that only cause noise during the daytime when the project is collecting energy from the sun. Ollson added that it is only a slight hum that will not be intrusive nor impact the quality of life for nearby residents because the inverters are typically placed within the project making them further away from residences. Ollson then talked about the fire hazard of solar farms and stated that fires are a very rare and low risk event for solar farms and assured that if there

were to be a fire, it would likely occur at the inverters, but that there would not be any toxic emissions as a result. In conclusion, Ollson stated that there are no health or safety impacts for residents near the project and that the project is safe for Livingston County. Ollson encouraged the developer to work with local fire departments. There was then a question by a ZBA member about what is keeping the components in the solar panels that prevents them from leaching. Ollson stated that the components are encased in glass and silicone. A follow up question was asked if there were multiple layers of protection. Ollson stated that there are and that there is enough protection that hail damage would not completely destroy the panels.

A ZBA member then asked the applicants if they have met with local fire departments yet. Fuchs stated that he has met with the Pontiac and Odell Fire Chiefs to discuss future training with them as well as their mutual aid partners.

There was then a question by a ZBA member about the location of the inverters relative to nearby residences. The applicants clarified the indicators on the submitted site plans that show the location of the inverters and explained that they would likely be about 500 feet from the closest residences.

There was then discussion about the noise level from the inverters and substation.

Stahl then asked Ollson if the panels and other components are considered hazardous waste at the end of their useful life. Ollson stated that they typically are not and that there are actually an increasing number of places opening that can recycle the components.

Huisman then called a break at 8:16 p.m.

Huisman then called the meeting back to order at 8:29 p.m.

Uphoff then introduced Loomis as his next witness. Loomis introduced himself as an expert in economic analysis and described his education and experience. Loomis then explained the different areas of the economy that this project would benefit as well as the number of jobs that would be created during construction and during operation. Additionally, Loomis talked about the subsequent benefit to the local economy as a result of increased employment for the project. Loomis then discussed the method in which the taxes are calculated for solar projects as well as the tax benefits that the project would have to the county's taxing bodies, namely the school districts.

There was then a question by a ZBA member about what types of jobs would be created. Loomis explained that there would be operations and maintenance jobs such as mowing and solar technicians as well as jobs created by the additional stream of income to the taxing bodies.

Russow then asked if the solar technicians would be local. Loomis stated that there are local community colleges such as Heartland that have solar technician programs. Russow asked about whether solar farms are low maintenance and if they would require many ongoing jobs. Loomis stated that they are relatively low maintenance, but that there is quite a bit of ongoing maintenance that needs to take place to optimize the production of the project such as cleaning and maintaining

panels. Russow then asked how many solar technicians would be retained for employment to which Loomis responded that there would be approximately 3.3 technicians.

A ZBA member then asked for clarification on the meaning of induced impact. Loomis explained that as local residents have more jobs and more money to spend, it creates more business for local businesses who then would require more jobs to keep up with the increased demand.

Turner then made a motion, seconded by Stock that this meeting be recessed to June 22<sup>nd</sup> at 6 p.m.

**Motion carried unanimously by a roll call vote of all ayes.** Ayes: Turner, Stock, Flott, Kiefer, Huisman. Absent: Runyon and Randolph

This meeting was recessed at 9:02 p.m.

Material regarding these proceedings is on file in the Livingston County Regional Planning Commission Office, in the Livingston County Historic Courthouse, 112 W. Madison St., Pontiac, Illinois.

Respectfully submitted,

Jesse J. King, Administrator  
Livingston County Regional  
Planning Commission