

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Werman called the regular meeting of the City of Rockford Planning and Zoning Commission to order on **April 14, 2016** at 7:00 p.m. The meeting was held in the Council Chambers of City Hall, 6031 Main Street, Rockford, MN.

ROLL CALL

Roll call was taken and the following members were present: Werman, Cihlar and Sand. The following members were absent: Petersen-Biorn. Also in attendance was Deputy Clerk Etzel.

PUBLIC HEARING/Conditional Use Permit – 6800 Electric Drive/PID 113-026-001010 to Amend Conditional Use Permit #13-10 to Allow the Expansion of an Existing Solar Array Ground Mounted Systems.

Deputy Clerk Etzel read a report prepared by Planner Licht. Wright Hennepin Cooperative Electric Association is proposing to expand the solar energy system with a second array on their corporate campus located at 6800 Electric Drive. The solar energy system consists of the solar arrays with an area (plan view) of 21,200 square feet to be located northeast of the principal building on property. The subject site is zoned I-1, Industrial District. Solar energy systems are allowed as a conditional use within the I-1 District subject to the performance standards established by Section 1001.09, Subd. 21.B of the Zoning Ordinance.

Wright-Hennepin received approval of a CUP to allow construction of an initial 14,441 square foot solar array at the northwest corner of the property in 2013. The proposal to expand the solar energy system is being processed as an amendment of the 2013 CUP and a public hearing to consider the request has been noticed for the Planning Commission meeting on April 14, 2016.

Freestanding solar energy systems are allowed in the I-1 District subject to approval of a conditional use permit based on the performance standards established by Section 1001.09, Subd. 21.B of the zoning Ordinance.

The area of ground mounted solar arrays within I-1 District is limited to five percent of the lot area. The subject site has an area of 32.19 acres. The total area of existing and proposed solar arrays within the subject site is 35,649 square feet, or 2.7 percent of the lot area, which complies with the Zoning Ordinance.

The proposed solar array is to be located in the rear yard of the subject site. Section 1001.09, Subd. 21.B.3.b(3) of the Zoning Ordinance requires that the solar array be setback 10 feet from any side or rear lot line. The site plan submitted with the application is not drawn to scale and does not include a measurement to the rear property line to the north. However, based on the illustration, the location of the proposed solar array appears to be well in excess of 10 feet from the rear property line or east side lot line. The developer must also verify that the proposed solar array does not encroach into any drainage and utility easement.

Section 1001.09, Subd. 21.B.3.b(5) of the Zoning Ordinance limits the height of the solar array to that allowed in the I-1 District. The maximum height allowed in the I-1 District is four stories

(48 feet). The height of the solar array above grade is specified as approximately 15 feet, which complies with the requirements of the Zoning Ordinance.

Section 1001.09, Subd. 21.B.4 of the Zoning Ordinance requires that the proposed solar array be screened from view of adjacent residential properties. There are existing residential uses to the north and east of the proposed solar array location. These homes are separated from the proposed solar array by wetland areas and there is significant existing vegetation along the lot lines of the subject site to meet the screening requirement of the Zoning Ordinance. No additional plantings are recommended.

Section 1001.09, Subd. 21.B.2.a of the Zoning Ordinance requires all utilities serving the solar array to be installed underground.

The proposed solar array expansion for Wright-Hennepin complies with the standards for ground mounted systems required by the Zoning Ordinance. The Planning Company recommends approval of conditional use permit amendment subject to the following conditions:

1. The solar energy system shall comply with all applicable electrical standards required by Section 1001.09, Subd. 21.B.2.a of the Zoning Ordinance, shall comply to the requirements of the Building Code and shall be certified by Underwriters Laboratories, Inc.
2. The property owner shall obtain a building permit prior to installation of the solar energy system if required by the Building Code.

Chair Werman opened the public hearing at 7:07 p.m.

Sue Verhoven of 3741 Halsey Avenue SE, Rockford Township stated she has concerns regarding the reflective light from existing panels, size and proximity of the solar panels to their property. She would also like to know if the panels would produce any electrical field that they should be concerned about. With the distance, Sue would like to see more pine trees for screening be required.

Steve Nisbet/Wright Hennepin Electric of 6800 Electric Drive was present to answer questions. The panels proposed are a different style from the panel installed in 2013, there will be no reflection on the back of the panel and are proposed be 20' off the property line. There is no electrical field as the panels will be ground at the base of the piling (DC). The transformer is away from the residential area near the Wright-Hennepin parking lot and is connected by AC. The existing site covers about 14,000 square feet and the proposed expansion will be about three-times at about 21,000 square feet.

Mr. Nisbet has spoken to Trevor Brummer, the Public Works Director regarding the drainage and utility easement and will adjust the panel placement to not encroach on the easement. There will be a minimum of 25' between the rows to avoid shadowing. The height is similar to the panels installed at the water tower site in Millennium Park, but these will be more even in heights at about 3' off the ground and approximately 12' high with natural grass underneath.

Chairperson Werman closed the public hearing at 7:18 p.m.

The commission discussed the proposal and had concerns about screening and would recommend additional pine trees be added.

The Planning Commission agreed with the Planner's recommendations.

MOTION was made by Cihlar, seconded by Sand to recommend the City Council approve the Resolutions approving the Conditional Use Permit (CUP) to amend the existing CUP to allow for the installation and operation of expanded solar array equipment within the property located at 6800 Electric Drive; along with the three conditions listed and adding a fourth condition to require additional pine trees for screening to the north side of the proposed expansion.

MOTION CARRIED – VOTING IN FAVOR – WERMAN, CIHLAR, and SAND

The recommendation from the Planning Commission for the conditional use permit will be submitted to the City Council at their April 26, 2016 regular meeting for final approval or denial.

***Approve Planning and Zoning Special Minutes/September 3, 2015**

MOTION was made by Werman, seconded by Sand to accept the September 3, 2015 Special Planning and Zoning minutes.

MOTION CARRIED – VOTING IN FAVOR – WERMAN, CIHLAR, and SAND.

***Approve Planning and Zoning Regular Minutes/February 11, 2016**

MOTION was made by Werman, seconded by Sand to accept the February 11, 2016 Regular Planning and Zoning minutes.

MOTION CARRIED – VOTING IN FAVOR – WERMAN, CIHLAR, and SAND.

OPEN FORUM

Chair Werman called for open forum, no one from the public spoke.

Recommend Planning and Zoning Commissioner Nick Morter

Resident Nick Morter is interested in the open position on the Planning and Zoning Commission. The open term is for three-years. Mr. Morter has been a resident in the City of Rockford for six years and is looking to get more involved in the community.

MOTION was made by Cihlar, seconded by Werman to recommend appointing Nick Morter to fill the vacant Planning and Zoning Commission position expiring on December 31, 2018.

MOTION CARRIED – VOTING IN FAVOR – WERMAN, CIHLAR, and SAND.

Planning commission's recommendation will be forwarded to City Council on April 26, 2016 for approval of appointment.

Staff Reports

Deputy Clerk Etzel's report included: downtown revitalization has begun, lumberyard re-development is being drafted, no P&Z meeting April 28th and upcoming community events: Hydrant Flushing, Clean-Up Day, Fire Department Pancake Breakfast and Thousand Hearts Crow River Serve Day.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION TO ADJOURN was made by Werman, seconded by Sand.

MOTION CARRIED – VOTING IN FAVOR – WERMAN, SAND and CIHLAR.

Chair Werman adjourned the meeting at 7:33 p.m.

Submitted by Audra Etzel, Deputy Clerk