

Agenda: The Tuscola Planning Commission held a public hearing on Thursday, January 26th at 7:00 P.M., at 214 N. Main, Tuscola IL. to consider one request.

The request is submitted by Elk Development LLC. The request is for a community solar project located at parcel 09-02-27-300-001, Tuscola. The property is zoned T, transitional District, which does not allow community solar projects without a special use permit.

Minutes: The Zoning board of appeals meeting was called to order by Chairman Hilgendorf, at 7:00 PM. Roll call was taken and all members were present. Hilgendorf declared a quorum and continued by reading the requests for the variance located at parcel 09-02-27-300-001. Hilgendorf reminded everyone that the city council will have final approval.

Hilgendorf asked the applicant if they would like address the board with their request.

Bob McNeill, development project manager with pivot energy.

McNeill stated they are proposing a community solar project on the property that will be fully fenced with an access road off of highway 45, a small service pad for transformers and equipment as noted on the site plan. They plan to use 28 acres of the 42 acres available. They like this site due to no adjacent residential, as the site is 12-14 foot below the grade of the railroad tracks which will obscure the view from the east (Ervin Park). He went on to say this was not a permanent fixture as the equipment has a normal lifespan of 20-25 years, after the lease is up the property will be remediated back to agricultural use. As the ground lies fallow during the solar use the soil is rejuvenated, to promote that they plan to plant a mixture of native plants, grasses and wildflowers. They have recently started becoming more involved with Agri voltaic with livestock, many of their newer projects have become a habitat for sheep as it helps with maintenance and adds life to the project. The solar panels will be trackers, they start in the morning facing east and slowly follow the sun throughout the day. They hope to produce over 11 MW of energy to the local grid over the course of a single year. This site is ideal for them as it has access away from residential and Ameren already has a three-phase connection area on the corner of the property. They plan to work with adjacent land owners and anyone to minimize the impact during construction while following all city ordinances and building codes. McNeill asked for questions.

Bennett asked if they were bi-facial panels?

McNeill said no they are trackers.

Reynolds asked if the power would be sold to the grid?

McNeill stated yes, with project like these people can become subscribers through Ameren for a fee and could see a reduction on energy bills. Having this kind of availability power is a critical element to attracting economic development to an area. With the proposed fertilizer plant being an immense draw on the grid projects like this can only help.

Hilgendorf asked if anyone else would like to speak:

Mayor Kleiss asked for more information on community solar through Ameren

McNeill stated everything is through Ameren but the company Sun central works with utilities to help manage.

Dan Myer asked how any structures would be secured in the ground and how deep?

McNeill stated they usually use helical piles with some concrete at the base, with the racking system mounted to them. Max height from the ground up is about 11 feet. After the project is at end of life everything is removed and the property turned back to natural state.

Hastings asked if they have decommissioned any end-of-life solar projects?

McNeill stated that they have not yet decommissioned any of their projects, he guessed that some may have been done out west that have been around 20 plus years. Pivot energy bought the company SGC in August, Elk Development LLC handles solar projects in Illinois. Pivot has constructed about 6 solar farms mainly in the southwest area, with no issues as far as he knows. A benefit of solar over other energy producers, wind turbines are a visual nuisance, coal has an air quality nuisance, Nuclear having its own category on nuisances. Solar has none of these, the biggest complaints were removing of farmland and glare. Glare is non issue as there is no glare, and flat farmland is the best location for these types of projects. They try to pick sites where not a lot of people are affected and about 20 acres of property. They have projects around the state they are trying to spread them out and not flood one area.

Hastings asked if they needed any permits from the state?

McNeill said no, after special use approval they start working on getting building permits to start construction. Everything is built to code.

Adkisson asked how long construction would take? and how many workers?

McNeill said weather permitting 3 to 5 months, if approved they would start the next spring and maybe 40-60 at peak, all workers would park on site, all equipment would be delivered in the first month.

Poindexter said highway 45 is quite busy and wanted to make sure adequate parking was available on site for all workers.

McNeill stated they work with everyone to not cause a disruption to traffic, and none of the workers would be parked along 45, all parking will be on-site.

Phillip Myer asked after the 20-25 years what was the plan for the panels.

McNeill explained the panels go into the secondary market and are rebuilt and resold, those that can not be rebuilt are recycled.

Dan Myer asked if they purchased the ground.

McNeill stated that they lease the property from the current owner for 20 years, and there is usually an option to go past that time in 5-year increments if the property owner so chooses. The condition of the equipment after 20 years plays a big part in extending the lease. If the property owner decides not to renew the lease the decommissioning would begin. The land should be rejuvenated by natural arctician or by sheep on the property and ideal for farming.

Bequette asked how many sheep and would there be fences?

McNeill stated he was not sure of this site would have sheep, but it depended on the market and the proficiency of the land for sheep farming.

Bequette asked if they had sheep at other sites?

McNeill said yes, they have a agricultural fence around the property for the sheep.

Bequette asked that the sheep just wander around the panels.

McNeill said they graze and help with mowing; they have crews that maintain the site.

Bequette asked if the person who counts the sheep falls asleep a lot.

McNeill said the owner of the sheep counts them as they are delivered and picked up

Hilgendorf asked for any more questions. As there were none, Hilgendorf asked for a motion.

A motion was made by Bennet to approve the Special Use as submitted. The motion was seconded by Adkisson.

Motion for 09-02-27-300-001.

Name	Present	Absent	Yes	No	Abstain
Brett Adkisson	X		X		
Brad Bennett	X		X		
Randy Hastings	X		X		
Alan Hettinger	X		X		
Steve Hilgendorf	X				X
Terry Poindexter	X		X		
Jerry Reynolds	X		X		

Motion passed. Hilgendorf stated the recommendation will be sent to the City Council.

Meeting adjourned at 7:32PM.

Prepared by Inspector Salmon.