

Meeting of the Planning Commission

Date: March 9, 2023

Agenda: The planning commission will hold a public meeting to consider a request for a Special Use Permit. The meeting will take place at 7:00 p.m. on Thursday, March 9th, 2023, at City Hall, 214 N. Main, Tuscola, IL.

The request is made by Adenium Solar and is for a community solar project at parcel 1298 Egyptian Trail, Tuscola. The property is zoned T, transitional, which does not allow community solar projects without a special use permit.

Minutes: The Zoning board of appeals meeting was called to order by acting chairman Randy Hastings, at 7:00 PM. Roll call was taken. Hastings declared a quorum and continued by reading the request for the special use located at 1298 Egyptian trail. Hastings reminded everyone that the city council will have final approval.

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

Paul Bottum, development project manager with Cultivate power.

There was a power point presentation (available upon request)

Bottum stated that cultivate power has been around for over 35 years and is developing projects in 25 states.

Bottum gave an overview of community solar projects in the state of Illinois.

Bottum said the request was for a 5MW project in compliance with all city codes and conditions for special use, the site was chosen for the proximity to Ameren infrastructure, topography of the land, city ordinances, landowner interest, and current and surrounding uses.

Bottum remarked that this parcel had another special use approved in 2018 that never was started

Bottum stated the project would produce power for roughly 1100 homes, create a positive economic impact on the community, provide 24 local jobs during construction, and will take around 12-16 weeks to build.

Bottum said the project would have a single access gravel road to the center of the project where an equipment pad is located. This is the only concrete on the whole project. The project will be surrounding by a 7-foot chain link fence and access is only for service personal and emergency services. Along with the fence on the north and east sides there will also be a vegetation buffer for ascetics. The main area will be single axis tracker panels. Steel post will hold the panels without concrete and local vegetation will be maintained.

- **The Plan Commission shall review the particular facts and circumstances of each proposed special use in terms of the following standards and requirements and shall find adequate evidence showing that such use at the proposed location:**
- (1) **Is in fact, a special use in § 156.092 for the zoning district in which it would be located;** *The proposed project is in a "T" transitional zoning district where it would require approval as a Special Use*
- (2) **Will be harmonious with and in accordance with the general objectives, or with any specific provision, of the city Comprehensive Plan or zoning code;** *The proposed special use is consistent with the City of Tuscola Comprehensive Plan and City of Tuscola Special Use Permit standards. The Project will maintain the rural character of the land as a low profile and temporary installation, will preserve the quality of the land for future generations of farming, will not strain the town's utilities or resources, and will have no negative impact on neighboring properties.*

- (3) **Will be designed, constructed, operated, and maintained so as to be harmonious and appropriate in appearance with the existing or intended character of the general character of the general vicinity and that such use will not change the essential character of the same area;** *The proposed project will be designed, constructed, operated and maintained in compliance with the Special Use standards and will not change the rural character of the land. The solar farm will not impact the pre-determined characteristics of the zoning district or surrounding area. The project area is set back from Egyptian Trail on the East side of the parcel and a natural vegetation will be installed on the North and East sides of the property as a buffer for the neighboring properties. By adhering to the required site constraints and acknowledging the minimal impact associated with solar farms, there will be no outstanding ramifications detrimental to the neighboring properties.*
- (4) **Will not be hazardous or disturbing to the existing or future neighboring uses;** *The proposed project will not be hazardous or have any negative impact on existing or future neighboring uses. Solar components will comply with the current edition of the National Electric Code, will be UL listed (or equivalent) and will be designed with anti-reflective coating, all of which will work to ensure the above approval criteria is met. The project is committed to landscaping best practices that stabilize the soil to add strength and durability for the long-term success of the project and health of the land.*
- (5) **Will be served adequately by essential public facilities and services such as highways, streets, police and fire protection, drainage structures, refuse disposal, water and sewer, and schools; or that persons or agencies responsible for the establishment of the proposed use shall be able to provide adequately any such services;** *The proposed project will work with the existing road, police and fire protection services. Adequate utilities, access roads, drainage and other necessary facilities will be provided by the project. The active area of the solar farm will be enclosed by a chain link fence and gated for security purposes. Access codes to the gate will be provided to the police, fire and emergency services. There is limited concrete on the site. The project will not require water or sewage services.*
- (6) **Will not create excessive additional requirements at public cost for public facilities and services and will not be detrimental to the economic welfare of the community;** *The proposed Special Use will have no negative impact on the economic welfare of surrounding community members. There will be no buildings or employees on the property so there is no need for sewage disposal, solid waste or water facilities at the site. The project's property tax benefits to the community will have a positive effect on the economic welfare of the community.*
- (7) **Will not involve uses, activities, processes, materials, equipment, or conditions of operation that will be detrimental to any persons, property, or the general welfare by reason of excessive production of traffic, noise, smoke, fumes, glare, or odors;** *The proposed project will not involve any use, activity, process, materials or equipment or conditions of operation that will be detrimental to any person, property or the general welfare of the community. There will be a limited temporary rise in traffic during the 12–16-week construction period. Thereafter, only a few site visits per year are anticipated for site maintenance, significantly less traffic than a business or single-family home. The project will produce no smoke, fumes, glare or odor. Inverters, the main source of noise on the project, will be centrally located so that noise will not be heard beyond the property line.*
- (8) **Will have vehicular approaches to the property which shall be so designed as not to create an interference with traffic on the surrounding public thoroughfares;** *The proposed solar energy system will generate a slight uptick in traffic during construction. The site will be designed with efficient access to the site while providing ingress and egress that minimizes local congestion. After construction is complete, the only traffic at the site will be vegetation management and inspection of the solar system.*
- (9) **Will not result in the destruction, loss, or damage to cultural, scenic, or historic features;** *The proposed project will not result in the destruction, loss or damage to cultural, scenic or historic features. The project will complete a consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office prior to construction.*

- **156.117 Electrical substation: Side and rear yards shall be a minimum of 20 feet. 6-foot wire mesh or solid fence required around site;** *The proposed project will adhere to a front setback of 600 feet, side setbacks of 25 feet and rear setback of 75 feet. The project will be enclosed by a 7' chain link fence with a gate for security purposes. An appropriate warning sign will be provided at the entrance to the facility and along the perimeter of the solar farm project. The sign at the entrance to the facility will include a 24-hour emergency contact number.*

Bottum said agricultural preservation will maintain permeable nature of the land due to limited concrete, field tiles located prior to construction will be designed around and repaired/replaced when needed, land is seeded with native IL vegetation and maintained, and as the land lies fallow it allows natural biological process to rejuvenate the soil.

The project will be compliant for construction and deconstruction.

Bottum explained the various tax benefits to the community. The agricultural land is currently taxed at \$1,870.08 with the solar project it is estimated to be \$26,788.65 per year.

Bottum said decommissioning of the project happened within 12 months of final operation with the removal of all equipment and materials. Restoration of soil and vegetation.

In summary the project will provide Clean, local, reliable energy without the cost and hassle of rooftop, Subscriptions to electricity at or below market rates, Quiet and low-maintenance development, environmentally safe and pollution-free, Economic benefits for our landowner and Significant property tax revenue for the community.

Bottum asked for questions.

Bennett asked what is the anticipated life of the project?

Bottum said 40 years.

Bennett asked about the local vegetation?

Bottum stated prairie grass and clover

Bennett asked if the panels were bi-facial?

Bottum said single axis tracker panels.

Hastings asked what would be in the area between the project and Egyptian trail.

Bottum said it could remain farmland or something could be planted there.

Hastings asked if the project north of the access road could be moved more west to not be near the houses in southland acres about 250 feet?

Bottum said they would get with engineering and move the project as needed.

Nico Galletout, director of development with cultivate solar said that they were concerned with the project being close to the houses but with the way the racking system works that was best feasible. We are willing to move that area into the 600-foot buffer on the other side.

Salmon asked what is the overall height of the panels?

Bottum stated at max tracker height is 6 to 8 feet but never over 12 foot.

Random lady asked about noise?

Bottum said lower than 50 decibels at the property line.

Ed Carlton asked for clarity as line 7 states no noise

Galletout said the invertors are in the middle of the project and they hum but the sound would not carry past the property line.

Carlton had questions about moving the project away from the houses in Southland acres.

Galletout said the plan is currently compliant with city setbacks, but they are willing to look into moving the project to accommodate the residents of southland acres.

Tom Nation stated he owned the farmland across Egyptian trail asked about the pipelines going through the site

Galletout stated they were aware of the pipelines and they were not an issue.

Nation said if the project lifespan is 40 years how will the transition to newer equipment be performed?

Galletout stated the panels were their greatest asset and they will upgrade as needed to always be at max performance.

Salmon asked if they were leasing the property and for how long.

Bottum said yes, and for 40 years.

Ben Henson said when he looks out from his front yard he sees farmland, what will he see now?

Bottum said there will be a 7-foot chain link fence and on any residential side a vegetation screen consisting of evergreens and bushes when planted will be 3 to 5 feet tall. They should be around 8 foot tall in a few years.

Hastings asked if they would be maintained?

Bottum said yes.

Diane Smith asked who would do the weeding around the fence and how often?

Bottum said they have a landscape contract with a lawncare company to maintain the area as needed.

Galletout stated that they were only responsible for the areas in and around the fence, the landowner is still responsible for the property.

Smith said again she was concerned about seeing weeds outside the fence.

Carol Craig asked about the grass and weeds inside the fence and if they allowed it grow up to 6-feet?

Salmon stated that city ordinance's does not allow grass over 8 inches and would respond with violations if it did.

Random guy asked who the property owner was.

Salmon said Lincoln prairie enterprises.

Random guy asked if the products are American made.

Bottum said panels are imported and inverters are American made.

Carol craig asked if there will be security lights or any lights at night?

Bottum said the is no lighting on the site

Brett Wilson asked how this will affect property taxes and resell values?

Bottum said they have studies that show this size and type of project will have no adverse effect on properties.

Bennett asked if the Ameren interconnection has been approved?

Bottum said they were through the first part and can not get to the middle part until special use approval.

Bennett asked what the proposed construction timeframe?

Bottum said they would plan to start March or April 2024.

There were several comments at once from multiple people in southland acres not happy about the project.

Carol Craig asked if they had plans to expand further north?

Galletout said they only have a contract with this landowner and no control over other parcels.

Random guy asked how many acres is the parcel?

Galletout said 43 acres but they are only using 32.

Bennett asked if the owner of the parcel owned the next parcel south?

Galletout said no.

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

Andrew Bequette reminded the commission about motions.

A motion was made by Bennet to approve the Special Use with the conditions of moving the project near the houses in southland acres to the front south across the access road. The motion was seconded by Hettinger.

Salmon stated the revised site plan must be submitted before being sent to the council for approval.

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

Special use approved with conditions.

Prepared by Inspector Salmon.

Revised site plan submitted 4-4-2023, reviewed and approved 4-10-2023