

CASTLE ROCK TOWNSHIP
PLANNING COMMISSION PUBLIC HEARING
January 29, 2018 @ 6:30 p.m.

Approved

The Planning Commission of Castle Rock Township scheduled a Public Hearing to be held on Monday, January 22, 2018 at 6:30 p.m., which, due to inclement weather was postponed until Monday, January 29, 2018 at 6:30 p.m.

Present were Jeff Partington, Chair, Mary Ann Enggren, Vice-Chair, Jennifer Wegner, and Barbara Lang, Commission members. Commission member Mike Betzold was not present. Also attending were Len & Sheryl Schrader, Nancy Just, Kristen Sachwitz, Sandy Weber, Perry & Mary Collins, Hanna Barsness, Joel Barsness, and Andy Collins.

Hearing was called to order by Chair Jeff Partington at 6:30 pm and the Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Chair Jeff Partington read the purpose of the Hearing: The purpose of this hearing is to review an application for a Variance for placement of a rooftop retail solar panel system from Sheryl Schrader, 27963 Delft Ave, Northfield, MN.

Chair Partington invited Sheryl Schrader to explain the project, and she deferred to Kristen Sachwitz, a representative from All Energy Solar, who intend to provide the solar panel system for the project. Ms. Sachwitz indicated that the system will be installed on the garage building near the residence, which is a 22' x 26' structure. Because this is a relatively small building, they are requesting a Variance to the setbacks listed in the township Zoning Ordinance in order to maximize the energy that the panels could provide.

Mr. Partington explained what the township Zoning Ordinance says about setbacks for retail solar panel systems. He further explained that when this language was developed, the setbacks were established based on fire and safety codes. The township Building Official could not attend the Hearing, but he had sent an e-mail that Chair Partington read which explained the building codes and fire safety rules pertaining to solar panel systems. In summary his note included his statement that he would not support a variance for this project.

Ms. Sachwitz responded that firefighters would have easy access for this particular one-story building. Her opinion is that because this is a small building, if there ever was a fire, the building would most likely be a total loss and other fire safety issues wouldn't be factors. Chair Partington's response was that this particular project wouldn't be a unique set-up, so it is the Planning Commission's job to make sure we are upholding the township Ordinances. Fire safety is probably the most important reason for the setbacks, and much care was taken when the Ordinance was amended to determine appropriate setbacks.

Ms. Sachwitz expressed her opinion that the local Fire Chief should have the right to authorize a variance for the setback requirements. Commission member Jennifer Wegner asked if the owners or the contractor had sought the Fire Chief's opinion on this project, and Ms. Sachwitz responded that she wasn't aware they should have done this.

Sandy Weber asked that if this roof is unique, couldn't the solar panels be customized to comply with the setbacks? Ms. Sachwitz responded that the property owners qualify for a rebate for this project, and the rebate is only available for standard-sized panels. She also indicated that a 37 degree tilt is optimal to capture the most sunlight, so the garage building is the best place to place the panels.

Perry Collins asked what the difference is between a retail system and a wholesale system. Chair Partington answered that this system would be in the retail category. Wholesale systems are the larger solar farm systems, and systems like the one being proposed are considered to be retail systems.

Mary Collins asked if there are any side effects from this system that could possibly impact neighbors. Ms. Sachwitz responded to this question. The surfaces of the panels are non-glare, so they can absorb the

sunlight better. No electric fields are created that are any stronger than what would be generated by a countertop toaster.

Joel Barsness asked what the pitch of the roof is and if there would be any wind-load impact. Ms. Sachwitz indicated that more detailed information was provided with the application. Commission member Barbara Lang indicated that a complete detailed copy is available if anyone needs to look through it.

Chair Partington explained to those present that the Planning Commission is only making a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors, and the Supervisors are the ones who will actually make the final approval or rejection of the Variance application. He also reiterated that the job of the Planning Commission is to review these applications to make sure they are in compliance with the township Ordinances. In this case they are reviewing the project to determine if there is a valid reason that no other options are available and that a variance of the Ordinance would be appropriate.

Ms. Sachwitz asked if they can provide a statement from the Fire Chief for the Board of Supervisors meeting and was told she could do that if she wished. She also stated that it isn't about maxing out the available roof space available, the Variance request is about working with the individual. Mr. Partington's response was that the dilemma becomes that the Planning Commission's job is to work with what the existing rules and Ordinances are and that is the primary consideration.

Mr. Partington asked if there were any further comments or questions. Hearing none, he asked the Commission members if they needed any further discussion.

Jeff Partington / Jennifer Wegner made a motion that the Planning Commission recommendation is to not grant this Variance. 4 ayes. Motion carried.

Chairman Partington then reminded everyone that this information will go back to the Board of Supervisors to make the final determination at their meeting on February 12.

Jennifer Wegner / Mary Ann Enggren made a motion to adjourn Public Hearing. 4 ayes. Motion carried.

Public Hearings adjourned at 6:58 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Lang, Town Clerk
Castle Rock Township

Attest: Jeff Partington, Chair, Castle Rock Planning Commission