

**CASTLE ROCK TOWNSHIP
PLANNING COMMISSION PUBLIC HEARING
February 25, 2019 @ 6:30 p.m.**

The Planning Commission of Castle Rock Township scheduled a Public Hearing to be held on Monday, February 25, 2019 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 Heather Bergstrom, Rachel Cochrane, Nick Cochrane, Bryan Parrot, Mike Long, Mark Rathburn, Craig Knudsen, Laura Caspari, Andrew Dahlen, Cecelia Wolf, Sandy Weber, Fran Haan, John & Becky Hofacker, Erik Nielsen.

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 an Interim Use Permit to build, own, and operate a wholesale solar electric system on property owned by Richard A. Nielsen and Jane M. Nielsen ("Owners") and located at 24380 Chippendale Ave W (PID 07-01700-29-010).

Before further discussion, Chair Partington asked the representatives from the solar company and the power companies to give some background information about the project, which would most likely answer a lot of questions for those present. Mark Rathbun from Great River Energy spoke first. He explained that approximately 95% of the power to Dakota Electric comes through Great River Energy's system. 5% is sourced directly by Dakota Electric. At the present time approx. 25% of Great River Energy's energy comes from renewable energy sources, mainly solar. Due to state stipulations, power companies are required to meet specific percentages for renewable energy resources. When the opportunity came up for this project, a Request for Proposal was issued, and Engie was awarded this project.

Craig Knudsen from Dakota Electric spoke next and confirmed the information Mr. Rathbun explained regarding state requirements. Dakota Electric is proceeding with this project as a result of membership requests for supplying more renewable energy in the local area.

Andrew Dahlen from Engie explained that this project is sized for local needs. Large transmission lines are not required, and they are being mindful of keeping the rural areas intact as much as possible.

Planning Commission members asked questions regarding the project. There will be no equipment shed on the property. Phase I will include installation of the solar panels and a communication pole. The expectation is that there will be no more than two or three poles installed, not a cluster like the other solar farm in the township. The Phase II plan would be for the installation of storage batteries on-site. No further solar panels would be installed, and the storage units are minimal height. Proceeding with Phase II will be confirmed within five years.

Chairman Partington then opened the meeting to other questions from residents. John Hofacker asked about the location and layout of the panels. Chairman Partington invited anyone who was interested to the meeting table to look at the drawings that were submitted, and several residents took the time to look at the drawings.

Fran Haan asked why this project couldn't be located in a less visible spot. Chairman Partington explained that the previous location had to be denied as it was enrolled in the Agricultural Preserve Program and wasn't eligible to be used for this industrial use until 2022.

Rachel Cochrane asked why the governor was not petitioned to remove the previous site from the Agricultural Preserve Program. Mr. Dahlen explained that the process is time consuming, and they have deadlines to meet to complete the project, so this alternate site is being proposed.

Mr. Partington read the setback information from the Zoning Ordinance so everyone was informed about how far the panels have to be located from property lines as well as the centerline of the road.

There was discussion about planting a screenline of trees or some kind of slatted fencing along the west side of the project. Mr. Haan stated that he would prefer trees rather than a slatted fence. Mr. Partington indicated that the language in the Draft Resolution for the Interim Use Permit already includes the requirement of a screenline of trees, and Mr. Dahlen confirmed that they are already looking into this to determine what would be the best variety, and that they anticipate the trees would be planted outside the security fence.

Ms. Cochrane expressed concern that this array of solar panels could affect property values on surrounding land. Mr. Dahlen responded with some statistics from other areas with smaller solar farms such as this one, and there was no significant change in property value.

Sandy Weber, Chair of the Board of Supervisors, commented that the other solar farm has county inspections in place to verify that the pollinators are established per the specifications, and the intention is that the same inspections would take place for this location.

Nick Cochrane asked what the benefit to the local residents would be for having this solar energy in the area. Mr. Knudsen from Dakota Electric explained that installation costs shouldn't affect local rates. Arrangements can be made with their office for blocks of renewable energy to be purchased by customers at market rates.

Mr. Haan asked what kind of solar radiation comes off of these systems. It was explained that the panels are designed to absorb energy, not to radiate anything. Their design also eliminates glare issues, as the whole purpose is to absorb the light to create energy.

Chairman Partington reminded everyone that the purpose of the meeting is to review the application to verify that the project meets the requirements of the township zoning ordinance. He asked if there were further questions. No further questions being heard, Mr. Partington asked for a motion from the Planning Commission regarding their recommendation to the Board of Supervisors.

Jennifer Wegner / Jeff Partington made a motion to recommend proceeding with this project following the conditions listed in the Draft Resolution for the Interim Use Permit. No further discussion. 4 ayes. Motion carried.

Barbara Lang / Mary Ann Enggren made a motion to adjourn the Public Hearing. 4 ayes. Motion carried.

Public Hearing adjourned at 7:20 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Barbara Lang, Town Clerk
Castle Rock Township

Attest: Jeff Partington, Chair, Castle Rock Planning Commission