

**BIG LAKE CITY COUNCIL  
WORKSHOP MINUTES**

**APRIL 15, 2015**

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Danielowski called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

**2. ROLL CALL**

Council Members present: Nick Christenson, Raeanne Danielowski, Seth Hansen, Duane Langsdorf, and Mike Wallen.

Also present: Interim City Administrator Joel Scharf, City Clerk Gina Wolbeck, Public Works Director Mike Goebel, Liquor Store Manager Jan Muehlbauer, Building Official Mick Kaehler, Consultant City Planner Ben Wikstrom, John Uphoff from WSB & Associates, Inc., and City Engineer Brad DeWolf from Bolton and Menk, Inc. Also in attendance: Big Lake Township Supervisor Larry Alford.

**3. PROPOSED AGENDA**

Council Member Wallen motioned to adopt the proposed Agenda as presented. Seconded by Council Member Langsdorf, unanimous ayes, agenda adopted.

**4. BUSINESS**

**4A. Solar Farm Presentation**

John Uphoff discussed the Solar Farm proposal that is being brought to the City as an Economic Development strategy. Uphoff reviewed previous staff discussions with SolarStone Partners LLC in regards to leasing the City of Big Lake's 26.83 acre field for the purpose of installing solar equipment. The site is located south of Big Lake just off Highway 25 next to the old airport. SolarStone has proposed leasing the property at \$700 per acre with an escalation of 2.5% each year up to 20 years. Uphoff clarified that while the City does own the parcel, it is located in Big Lake Township and was originally purchased in 1991 for the purpose of biosolids application. Mike Goebel noted that wastewater funds were used to purchase the property, but that it hasn't been used for biosolids application since 2010. Uphoff discussed future use of this property, noting that the parcel is land locked, and that it will likely be the last parcel in the site area that would be developed. Uphoff also discussed the significant difference between Solar Farms and Solar Gardens explaining that regulation of the land use remains with the local jurisdiction due to the smaller size of a Solar Garden compared to a Solar Farm. The project being proposed is considered a Solar Garden.

Gordy Simanton and Kaya Tarhan from SolarStone Partners LLC provided information on Solar Energy Legislation, and described what a Solar Garden is, and how it works. Simanton reviewed the history of their company noting that they are located in Minneapolis with 25+ years of renewable energy development experience. Simanton explained that in 2013, the State of MN enacted the Community Solar Program to significantly increase the production of clean energy. Simanton described what a Solar Garden is, noting that it generates offsite, decentralized solar energy, and distributes utility scale power directly to the existing electrical grid. Solar Gardens offer Subscriber options, whereas Solar Farms do not. Simanton discussed the lease and tax value analysis. City Lease revenue over the term of the Contract is projected to be \$546,000, tax revenue totaling \$46,020 payable to Big Lake Township, and County tax revenue totaling \$184,080.

Council questioned what happens at the term of the lease. Tarhan explained that the lease can be renewed, or if the City chooses not to renew, SolarStone would be required to remove the panels and repurpose for other uses.

Larry Alford's questioned why SolarStone isn't looking at utility right-of-way land to lease. Alford's questioned why they take agricultural land over right-of-way areas as they do in Canada. Tarhan noted that the sites need to have the right orientation going east/west for Solar to work. The parcel needs to be long and linear.

Council discussed the revenue benefits of this type of lease and the positive legacy solar energy provides. Council discussed the benefits of the equipment being owned by SolarStone and that State Law requires that equipment can't be abandoned.

Brad DeWolf discussed the capital investment of water and sewer infrastructure that exists in this site area.

It was the consensus of the Council to proceed with obtaining further information on establishing this site for a lease with SolarStone. Council also directed staff to start the process for obtaining an analysis on the City becoming a Solar Subscriber.

#### **4B. Planning Items Discussion**

Ben Wikstrom discussed Planning Department items including accessory structure building materials, dis-repaired properties, and impervious surface limits. Staff noted that the current code states that accessory structure materials have to match the primary structure. Wikstrom reviewed language from surrounding communities relating to building materials. Council discussed the need for more regulation on garage structures versus small sheds.

Discussion was held on shed sizes being 120 sq. ft. or less being less restrictive on building material requirements, and that any structure over 120 sq. ft. having to match the principle structures building materials.

Council Member Wallen left the meeting at 7:03 p.m.

Council directed staff to proceed with holding a public hearing at the Planning Commission for review of changes to building materials language for accessory structures.

Mick Kaehler discussed the Property Maintenance Code that addresses dis-repaired properties. Staff noted that with the new code enforcement process, we will need to follow through with citations.

Wikstrom reviewed Impervious Surface Limit regulations which are currently regulated at 25% Impervious Surface lot coverage. Staff asked for Council feedback on increasing the percentage to 35%. Discussion was held on properties located in the R5 and Shoreland Management area.

Council directed staff to proceed with an Ordinance amendment increasing the impervious surface limit to 35% outside the Shoreland Management Area.

#### **4C. Water Hydrant Repair Discussion**

Joel Scharf discussed damage that occurred to one of the City's water hydrants located at Hiawatha Avenue and Eagle Lake Road North. A vehicle left the roadway at the intersection after swerving to avoid a collision with a second vehicle. As a result of this, the hydrant was struck which is an essential piece of City infrastructure. The costs to repair the hydrant have exceeded \$14,000 and the driver and their insurance carrier have denied responsibility for the loss to the City. The vehicle alleged to have caused this evasive action has never been identified. Scharf noted that the City Attorney has asked for Council feedback on whether to proceed with formal litigation on this matter. Staff is recommending mediation proceedings. Council directed staff to proceed with mediation.

#### **4D. Potential Ordinance Discussion – Drug Paraphernalia and Crime Free Housing**

Joel Scharf reviewed the proactive approach of many communities in the State of MN with the issue of public sale of items reasonably utilized for the ingestion of controlled substances. Scharf noted that he is in the process of initiating a movement at the County level to adopt an ordinance related to these types of operations. Council discussed the need to be pro-active on this Ordinance. Council directed staff to proceed with drafting an Ordinance regulating offenses related to drug paraphernalia.

Scharf also discussed implementation of a Crime Free Housing Ordinance language that would apply to all residential rental property in the City. Currently, the City's rental registration and inspection requirements only apply to multi-unit complexes. This type of amendment would provide a tool for City Council to deal with problem properties in a more effective manner.

Council discussed ways to gauge how many rental properties exist in the City noting that a good indicator would be properties classified as non-homestead.

Staff discussed the impact this could have on staffing needs to affectively administer this revised program. Council directed staff to obtain more information on the number of rental properties that are located in the City, and to bring back to a future Council Workshop.

**5. OTHER**

Council Member Hansen provided an update on the recent Food Shelf meeting. The Food Shelf has been notified that the City needs additional space and they were strongly encouraged to consider taking ownership of the old Police Department building. Their representatives will report back to their Board of Directors for comment.

Scharf discussed the \$394,000 in Special Assessments against the property formerly owned by Bruggeman Properties and is now currently owned by the Gallus Family. Council directed staff to proceed with collection of the Special Assessments as were agreed upon in the 429 Assessment Agreement Filed as of Record.

**6. ADJOURN**

Council Member Langsdorf motioned to adjourn at 8:06 p.m. Seconded by Council Member Hansen, unanimous ayes, motion carried.

Gina Wolbeck  
Recorder

04/22/15  
Date Approved By Council