

**BIG LAKE BIG LAKE CITY COUNCIL AND BIG LAKE TOWNSHIP
JOINT MEETING MINUTES**

MAY 11, 2016

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Danielowski called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Council Members present: Mayor Raeanne Danielowski, Seth Hansen, Scott Marotz, and Mike Wallen. Council Member Absent: Duane Langsdorf.

Big Lake Township Supervisors present: Chair Bob Hofer, Bruce Aubol, Larry Alfords, Norm Leslie, and Steve Pflgebraar.

Also present: City Administrator Clay Wilfahrt, Finance Director Deb Wegeleben, City Clerk Gina Wolbeck, Big Lake Township Treasurer Ken Warneke, Big Lake Township Clerk Laura Hayes, Community Development Director Hanna Klimmek, Police Chief Joel Scharf, City Planner Michael Healy, Assistant City Engineer Jared Voge from Bolton and Menk, and Gordy Simonson from SolarStone.

3. PROPOSED AGENDA

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

4. BUSINESS

4A. Orderly Annexation Proposal – Parcel No. 10-325-3201

Clay Wilfahrt discussed the proposed Orderly Annexation of the City owned parcel identified as parcel no. 10-325-3201. Wilfahrt explained that the 26.71 acre site was formerly used as a biosolids dump site until the City expanded its wastewater treatment facility where product is now dried and sold. After the expansion was completed, the vacant lot was no longer needed as a biosolids application site. Wilfahrt also reviewed the lease agreement the City has with SolarStone to operate a 5 megawatt solar garden at this site. Wilfahrt also reviewed previous Township discussion regarding setbacks, screening, and decommissioning requirements. Wilfahrt explained that the City is seeking annexation of the site so that the City can follow through with the lease agreement with SolarStone.

Gordy Simonson from SolarStone discussed their proposed solar project and answered questions from City and Township officials. Simonson explained that the life expectancy of the panels is 40 to 50 years. SolarStone is looking at the panels as having a 25 to 30 year lifespan and have a 25 year warranty. Recycling would consist of either resale or recycling with SolarStone covering the cost. Simonson clarified that the MPCA does not currently have a policy on recycling. First Solar is the leader in recycling panels which is located in Ohio. Simonson also noted that a review of the panels at 10/15/20 years could happen. Efficiency will be looked at by SolarStone and the panels could be replaced as technologies improve, similar to when cell towers first started going up.

Wilfahrt explained that the plan is that the City will retain ownership of the parcel, noting that City's lease with SolarStone is for a 35 year term with cost escalation built into the lease. Discussion was held on SolarStone's financials, and that once the site is set up, it will be turned over to NRG Energy who has infused \$200 million into their solar projects. Simonson reviewed the SolarStone organization and reviewed Legislation directing Xcel Energy to focus on Solar Energy.

Town Board Members questioned why the City isn't following the County's solar ordinance. Wilfahrt discussed that the County's Ordinances are written for Solar Farms and pertain to property more rural in nature. Wilfahrt explained that by allowing the annexation to the City, this would take the pressure off the County of setting precedence. Discussion was also held on if a 20 foot setback would be enough for efficiency, and whether SolarStone would be willing to purchase more property to meet the 50 foot setback requirement. Wilfahrt reviewed comparable city solar ordinances. Setback requirements are in place to protect surrounding properties and requiring an Interim Use Permit would give the City control over use of the property. Discussion was also held on the current pace of development in the Big Lake area and whether this project would affect the proposed future rail park project. Wilfahrt noted that the proposed developer is aware of the solar project and hasn't voiced any concerns.

Town Board Members explained that the Township Board is not opposed to Solar Gardens, but is opposed to vying away from the County setback standards. Board Members discussed Buffalo Township's public hearing due to a deed restriction. Simonson reviewed differences between solar gardens and solar farms noting that 50 to 100 megawatts is considered a farm, and one to five megawatts is considered a garden.

Discussion was held on maintenance and operation plans. Staff reviewed the proposed evergreen shrubs planned for screening of the site, and Simonson informed the Board Members that SolarStone has taken a pollinator pledge.

Mayor Danielowski discussed past relations between the City and the Township and indicated that the City appreciates the working relationship with the Township. Danielowski also noted that this project offers the City an opportunity to utilize the site and generate some revenue and tax dollars.

Town Board Members noted that they are concerned about going against Sherburne County, and their intent is to protect the adjacent property owners to the site. Simonson noted that SolarStone has worked with Jim Hallila to address his concerns with aviation requirements. Discussion was also held on protecting the Townships right to have a say over future annexations on adjacent parcels to this site. Discussion was also held on what the cost is to install a solar garden. Simonson noted that the estimated cost to install a 5 megawatt site is approximately \$12.5 million.

Board Members discussed the next steps in annexation of the parcel.

5. OTHER

Supervisor Leslie asked to establish quarterly joint meetings between the City and the Township.

6. ADJOURN

Council Member Hansen motioned to adjourn at 5:53 p.m. Seconded by Council Member Wallen, unanimous ayes, motion carried.

Gina Wolbeck
Recorder

05/25/16
Date Approved By Council