

**BIG LAKE PLANNING COMMISSION  
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES**

**JUNE 15, 2016**

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Chair Marotz called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

**2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIENCE**

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

**3. ROLL CALL**

Commissioners present: Ketti Green, Scott Marotz, Patricia May, and Larry Sundberg.  
Commissioners absent: Seth Hansen, Jennifer Joseph and Scott Zettervall. Also present: City Planner Michael Healy and Administrative Assistant Sandy Petrowski.

**4. ADOPT AGENDA**

Commissioner Green moved to adopt the agenda. Seconded by Commissioner May, unanimous ayes, agenda adopted.

**5. OPEN FORUM**

Chair Marotz opened the Open Forum at 6:31 p.m. No one came forward for comment. Chair Marotz closed the Open Forum at 6:32 p.m.

**6. APPROVE MEETING MINUTES**

**6A. APPROVE PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES OF MAY 18, 2016**

Commissioner Green motioned to approve the May 18, 2016 Meeting Minutes. Seconded by Commissioner Sundberg, unanimous ayes, Minutes approved.

**6B. APPROVE PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES OF JUNE 1, 2016**

Commissioner May motioned to approve the June 1, 2016 Meeting Minutes. Seconded by Commissioner Sundberg, unanimous ayes, Minutes approved.

## **7. BUSINESS**

### **7A. PUBLIC HEARING: INTERIM USE PERMIT – SOLAR GARDEN PROJECT**

City Planner Michael Healy reviewed the June 9<sup>th</sup> memorandum on the Interim Use Permit application received from SolarStone Partners to construct a 5 megawatt solar garden on a 26.71 acre parcel owned by the City located on the southwest of the City. He reported that this parcel is currently in Big Lake Township and the City is pursuing the annexation of this parcel, noting that the approval of the proposed solar garden project will be contingent upon the successful annexation of the property. The proposed project is an allowable use within the City's Agricultural Zoning District with an Interim Use Permit and with specific setback and lot size requirements.

Healy discussed the following specifics of the proposed project:

- The applicant and the City will enter into a 35-year lease.
- It is a 5 Megawatt project.
- The project site will be screened to Sherburne County standards.
- There will be a 12-foot tall communication pole with satellite dish, as required by Big Lake Township; an initial proposal for an 85-foot communication pole was not allowed).

Also, the following terms of the proposed Interim Use Permit (IUP) were discussed:

- The IUP is contingent upon the annexation of the parcel into the City.
- The IUP will expire in 40 years; the lease with the City will be 35 years and, if the lease were to expire, the City would not be required to renew the lease.
- The solar garden must follow the City's zoning code.
- Stormwater management and erosion control plans must be provided and approved.
- The project site must be enclosed with a perimeter fence.
- The site is to be screened with 6-foot tall coniferous shrubs.
- The communication pole cannot be higher than 12-feet (not including the height of an attached satellite dish).
- Financial security is to be established for decommissioning costs.
- SolarStone Partners can sell the site, with conditions.
- The IUP can be revoked if any of the conditions are violated.

Chair Marotz opened the public hearing at 6:43 p.m.

SolarStone Partners rep, Joe DeVito, was in attendance to answer questions of the Commission.

Mr. Jim Hallila, owner of the property located at 19968 State Highway 25 NW, which is adjacent to the proposed project site, asked how the project would affect his land if he would decide to open up the airport again and how the property taxes on his property would be affected. Chair Marotz clarified that the only land to be annexed is the parcel for the solar garden project and all surrounding properties would remain in the township.

Chair Marotz closed the public hearing at 6:57 p.m.

Commissioner Green asked if there would be any glare onto the highway traffic from the proposed project. SolarStone Partners representative, Joe DeVito, stated that there would not be any glare as the solar panels absorb the sun rather than reflect it.

Mr. DeVito provided a brief explanation of the solar garden concept as well as how the garden works, how energy is captured and distributed, etc.

Commissioner Sundberg motioned to recommend that the City Council approve the proposed Interim Use Permit for SolarStone Partners as presented. Seconded by Commissioner Green, unanimous ayes, motion carried.

## **7B. DISCUSSION: PORTABLE SIGN SIZING**

Healy reported that this discussion is before the Commission as City staff was contacted by a business asking to be allowed to put up a 48 square foot temporary sign along Highway 10. He noted that the proposed sign is 16 square feet larger than what the current sign code allows but that the business representative has stated that they have used the allowed 32 square foot signs in the past but they were difficult to read from the highway.

Healy stated that there are currently a couple of non-conforming 48-foot portable signs in Big Lake which have been put up without appropriate permits and that staff has been intending to send letters requiring that the signs be removed and that an application must be submitted for the placement of a compliant 32 square foot sign. However, before sending the letters, staff determined that it would be prudent to bring this issue before the Planning Commission for discussion to ascertain if the Commission wanted to continue to cap the size of portable signs at 32 square feet or whether it was deemed appropriate to accommodate 48 square foot signs in some or all of the Industrial and Commercial zoning districts.

After a brief discussion, Commissioner Green motioned to recommend that the City Council amend the Sign Code to allow portable signs to be up to 48 square feet. Seconded by May, unanimous ayes motion carried.

## 7C. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT UPDATE

Healy briefly reviewed the following items from Community Development Director Hanna Klimmek's update:

- Business Retention & Expansion Visits: Staff has visited a total of five (5) businesses between May 20<sup>th</sup> and June 1<sup>st</sup> (i.e., CrossFit Confidence, Big Lake "Do It Best" Lumber, Great River Spine & Sport, Destination Outdoors Consignment, and Connexus Energy).
- Big Lake Farmer's Market: Wednesday, June 1<sup>st</sup>, was opening day for the Farmer's Market. This free event will take place every Wednesday through September. The Central MN Arts Board generously provided the City of Big Lake \$3,500 to schedule local musicians to perform their talents during the Farmer's Market. Corrie Scott, Farmer's Market Coordinator, has scheduled musicians for every week! Thank you Central MN Arts Board! Staff is working on growing the Farmer's Market. To incentivize more vendor participation, the Farmer's Market Committee is welcoming and allowing new vendors to pay a \$10 weekly charge rather than committing to the entire summer for the \$75 fee.
- Code Enforcement: The City has just signed a 1-year service contract with SeeClickFix, which is a web based communication tool that will be available at the end of this month (June 24<sup>th</sup> is the roll-out date). This communication tool will provide residents with another option to submit complaints anonymously rather than filling out a form or coming into City Hall. This tool will also provide staff with organizing code enforcement and reporting.
- Development: Year-to-date, staff have approved 31 single-family building permits. Staff is predicting the City will see 50-75 new builds this year if submissions continue at this rate. There are 10 construction/building companies that are building within the City.
- Other Exciting Things:
  - Big Lake Comprehensive Housing Study Update has begun with Maxfield Research & Development.
  - Developers, realtors, city staff, and residents will soon benefit from the ability to access updated *for sale & for lease* information from the City website. Xceligent Direct will provide this service and embed all City listings into our website.

- Staff continues to work with a local internet provider as another option in the Industrial Park; at first, the priority will be to bring more reliable and cost effective service into the Industrial Park before expanding service throughout the area.
  - Staff attended and represented the City of Big Lake at the Economic Development Association of MN (EDAM) semi-annual conference in Duluth as well as the League of MN Cities annual conference in St. Paul this week as well as last week.
  - Received a quote from North Star Signs out of St. Cloud for “*for sale*” signage. They will be providing the City with proofs before an order is submitted.
- Building Permit Activity YTD through April 30, 2016:
- Single-Family New Builds = 29
  - Residential/Commercial Building Permits = 270
  - Total Valuation of All Permits = \$11,911,871.17

This item for information only; no action required or taken by the Commission.

## **8. PLANNER’S REPORT**

### **8A. DISCUSSION: BUFFER YARDS**

Healy stated that staff is asking the Commission to further discuss buffer yards in order to provide more clarity with regards to the placement of fences and accessory structures within buffer yards, prior to forwarding to the City Council for consideration. The original intent of buffer yards was to provide privacy, sound protection, and screening from roadway. Healy reviewed two (2) options to consider with regards to fences and accessory structures in buffer yards:

1. Continue to require 20-foot buffer yards with no structures allowed, and all currently existing structures located within buffer yards will be deemed as non-conforming but not grandfathered in;
2. Relax the buffer yard requirement to allow fences to be installed within the buffer yard.

It was the consensus of the Commission to not modify the original ordinance and to continue to require a 20-foot buffer yard with no structures being allowed within the buffer yard.

## **8B. UPDATE: ACCESSORY STRUCTURE DESIGN STANDARDS**

Healy reported that the issue of accessory structure design standards had been discussed at the May 18<sup>th</sup> Planning Commission and a public hearing was held at the Commission's June 1<sup>st</sup> to consider a proposed ordinance amendment regarding allowable exterior materials for accessory structures.

At the June 1<sup>st</sup> meeting, the Commission recommended that the City Council adopt the amendment which included allowing screen tents and fabric gazebos on patios and decks. Staff is asking for clarification from the Commission with regards to whether or not screen tents would be allowed to be placed on grass as well and the following proposed language was presented for the Planning Commission's review:

- Canvas, fabric, or plastic sheet covered structures and accessory buildings are prohibited in all residential zoning districts with the following exceptions: Permanent and semi-permanent screen tents and fabric-covered gazebos are permitted for recreational use, but not for storage, provided that they are located on an approved deck or patio; Temporary seasonal screen tents are permitted on the grass,

Commissioner Green motioned to recommend that the City Council approve the previously discussed ordinance amendment with the proposed changes to allow seasonal screen tents to be on the grass. Seconded by Commissioner Sundberg, unanimous ayes, motion carried.

## **9. COMMISSIONERS' REPORTS**

Commissioner Green asked for an update on the proposed auto repair shop at 401 Jefferson Boulevard and whether all of the criteria of the Interim Use Permit (IUP) have been met to allow the owner to be conducting business. Healy reported that staff had inquired about work being done at the property and the owner stated that no work is being done on any vehicles other than his own private cars. Healy also informed the Commission that the IUP for this property will expire in September 2016.

**10. OTHER** – None.

## **11. ADJOURN**

Commissioner Green motioned to adjourn at 7:42 p.m. Seconded by Commissioner Sundberg, unanimous ayes, motion carried.