

## PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING FOR THE CITY OF WAITE PARK

The Waite Park Planning Commission met on Tuesday, July 11, 2017 at 6:30 pm.

The meeting was called to order by Chair Jansky beginning with the Pledge of Allegiance.

**Members Present:** Tim Jansky, Ken Schmitt, Bob Zabinski, Jeff Blair and Bonnie Hermanutz

**Others Present:** Jon Noerenberg, Planning and Community Development Director and those on the attendance sheet.

Commissioner Zabinski made a motion to accept the agenda as presented which was seconded by Commissioner Schmitt. Motion carried.

Commissioner Hermanutz made a motion to accept the minutes of April 11, 2017 with the addition of her name in attendance, which was seconded by Commissioner Zabinski. Motion carried.

Commissioner Schmitt made a motion to accept the minutes of June 13, 2017 as presented which was seconded by Commissioner Hermanutz. Motion carried.

### **Novel Solar Five LLP and Frank B. & Margaret Imholte Trust – 8158 County Road 138-Conditional Use Permit**

Chair Jansky read the Public Hearing notice and the Public Hearing was opened at 6:34 p.m.

Jon Noerenberg, Planning and Community Development Director, gave his report. A request has been submitted by Novel Solar Five LLP on behalf and with permission of Frank B. & Margaret Imholte Trust (property owners) to allow for a 1 MW standalone solar array in an A-1, Agricultural/Rural Residential District. The proposed use would be located on the norther portion of property owned by the Imholtes and located at 8158 County Road 138, on the northern side of the road and to the north of their home.

Per the A-1, Agricultural/Rural Residential District standards, staff has made the previous determination that standalone solar arrays are considered a conditional use within the district, under the broader classification of “essential services, governmental and public utility buildings and structures”.

The proposed solar array is intended to serve as a “community solar garden” as per an Xcel Energy program approved and supported by the State of Minnesota to provide for renewable energy supplies. The intent of such community solar garden is to offer subscription-based solar power options to homes and businesses which are unable to install solar facilities upon their own property. This proposed site would generate 1MW of power and the land would continue to be owned by the Imholtes, with a lease to Novel Solar Five LLP for the project duration of 25 years. The intent would be to remove the solar components and all associated equipment at the end of the 25 year period.

The total proposed array is outlined on the attached site plan. The array would consist of 4,680 total solar panels, with 9 rows with 30 foot row-to-row spacing. The racking system and panels are of a static (non-moving) design and do not track or follow the sun. They have an average overall height

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of 9 ½ feet, although some may be up to a maximum of 15' height depending on grade in their location. The proposed layout is subject to engineering and final Xcel program approval and may change slightly prior to construction, but would be subject to review/approval by both City of Waite Park and the Sauk River Watershed due to its proximity to the Sauk River.

The proposed array would be located approximately 450 feet from County Road 138 and approximately 150 feet from the adjacent Donovan property. The adjacent property to the east is farmed land and would have an approximate 325 foot setback. Transformers and related equipment would be placed on a 16' x 23' concrete slab adjacent to the array. The site would have gated access (with provision for emergency response personnel) and a security fence around the perimeter. If approved construction is proposed for late summer or fall of 2017. An access road would be constructed to the array, for construction and periodic maintenance use, with entrance via County Road 138.

The ground area underneath the array is proposed to have vegetation with low maintenance turf or similar seed mix, with pollinator plantings and/or native grasses per the attached landscaping plan. Periodic site maintenance would be utilized throughout the life of the array to control vegetation growth.

In reviewing the proposal with other City departments during standard review meeting, it was noted that the City has interest in maintaining an easement for a future bicycle trail connection through the Imholte property, as has been identified as part of the parks and trail planning. At this time it has not been determined whether the trail should or will run either along the Sauk River on the northern side, or adjacent to County Road 138 on the southern side of the property. The configuration of the solar array seems to be such that it would not restrict a possible future trail from locating along it should that option be pursued, but it is possible that some of the proposed trees noted as part of the landscape plan could be impacted.

Due to the uncertain timelines associated with trail development, staff would recommend making it a condition of approval that the property owners be a willing participant to future easement, to be determined at future date as necessary and subject to further discussion and agreements between all parties.

As this request includes a public hearing component, the Planning Commission will need to hold the public hearing prior to any action on the request. Staff has not received any questions or comments regarding the proposal as of Thursday, July 6<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Noerenberg read a letter from Frank and Peg Imholte in support of the project. No other comments or questions have been received.

Commissioner Hermanutz stated that she would like to see the power point presentation.

Paula Fitzgerald – Novel Solar Five LLP presented the power point regarding solar projects.

Motion by Planning Commission Member Schmitt to close the public hearing which was seconded Commissioner Hermanutz. Motion approved 5/0.

Public hearing closed at 6:59 PM.


After review of The Findings of Fact, Commissioner Schmitt moved to recommend to the City Council to approve the Conditional Use Permit, with the following additional conditions:

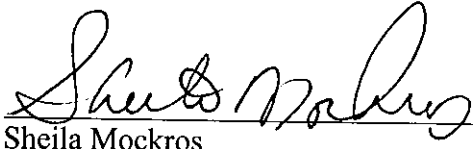
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1. The property owners or their heirs/successors shall be willing participants in dedication of future trail easement upon the property, to be determined at future date. Trail easement may require removal and/or relocation of landscaping.
2. Landscape plan shall be implemented as submitted and reviewed unless otherwise approved by City of Waite Park Planning & Community Development Director. Use of pollinator blend for site is encouraged.
3. Site layout shall adhere to proposed configuration submitted unless specific approval is provided by City of Waite Park. Major modifications may require review by Planning Commission and City Council.
4. All necessary building, land disturbance, and electrical permits shall be obtained prior to project commencement.
5. Approval of Sauk River Watershed District for finalized project configuration shall be submitted at time of building permit application.
6. The project shall be decommissioned and the site returned to pre-construction conditions by end of 2044.

Commissioner Zabinski seconded the motion. Motion carried 5/0.

Commissioner Hermanutz made a motion to adjourn, which was seconded by Commissioner Zabinski. Motion carried and the meeting was adjourned at 7:10 p.m.

  
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Tim Jansky, Chair

  
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Sheila Mockros  
Building/Planning Assistant

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