

**PLANNING COMMISSION
CITY OF RAMSEY
ANOKA COUNTY
STATE OF MINNESOTA**

The Ramsey Planning Commission conducted a regular meeting on Thursday, September 7, 2017, at the Ramsey Municipal Center, 7550 Sunwood Drive NW, Ramsey, Minnesota.

Members Present: Chairperson Randy Bauer
 Commissioner Bruce Anderson
 Commissioner Cheri Gengler
 Commissioner Cindy Nosan
 Commissioner Patrick Surma
 Commissioner Gary VanScoy

Members Absent: Commissioner Ralph Brauer

Also Present: Community Development Director Timothy Gladhill
 Community Development Intern Alec Henderson

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Bauer called the regular meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

2. CITIZEN INPUT

None.

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion by Commissioner Nosan, seconded by Commissioner Surma, to approve the agenda as presented.

Motion Carried. Voting Yes: Chairperson Bauer, Commissioners Nosan, Surma, Anderson, Gengler, and VanScoy. Voting No: None. Absent: Commissioner Brauer.

4. APPROVE PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES

4.01: Approve the Following Planning Commission Minutes:

4.01.1: Planning Commission Meeting Minutes Dated July 6, 2017

Motion by Commissioner VanScoy, seconded by Commissioner Nosan, to approve the following minutes as presented: Planning Commission Meeting Minutes dated July 6, 2017.

Motion Carried. Voting Yes: Chairperson Bauer, Commissioners VanScoy, Nosan, Anderson, Gengler, and Surma. Voting No: None. Absent: Commissioner Brauer.

4.01.2: Planning Commission Meeting Minutes Dated August 3, 2017

Motion by Commissioner VanScoy, seconded by Commissioner Nosan, to approve the following minutes as presented: Planning Commission Meeting Minutes dated August 3, 2017.

Motion Carried. Voting Yes: Chairperson Bauer, Commissioners VanScoy, Nosan, Anderson, Gengler, and Surma. Voting No: None. Absent: Commissioner Brauer.

5. PUBLIC HEARINGS/COMMISSION BUSINESS

5.01: Public Hearing: Consider a Request for a Conditional Use Permit for a Two-Story Accessory Building (Project No. 17-107); Case of Raymond & Linda Bonifas.

Public Hearing

Chairperson Bauer called the public hearing to order at 7:02 p.m.

Presentation

Community Development Director Gladhill presented the staff report stating the Applicant is requesting a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) for the construction of a two-story accessory building at 6451 170th Lane NW. Minnesota State Building Code classifies the storage space located in the attic space of the proposed accessory building due to the height from floor to ceiling. Staff provided further comment on the request and recommended approval of the CUP.

Citizen Input

Ray Bonifas, 6451 170th Lane NW, requested the Commission support the project and thought it would be an improvement to the neighborhood.

This evening the attached letters were received from a neighbor stressing their support of the request.

Motion by Commissioner Anderson, seconded by Commissioner VanScoy, to close the public hearing.

Motion Carried. Voting Yes: Chairperson Bauer, Commissioners Anderson, VanScoy, Gengler, Nosan, and Surma. Voting No: None. Absent: Commissioner Brauer.

Chairperson Bauer closed the public hearing closed at 7:06 p.m.

Commission Business

Commissioner VanScoy asked if the recitals were a change to the City approval process.

Community Development Director Gladhill commented on the City's new approval process noting the recitals had taken the place of Findings of Fact.

Motion by Commissioner VanScoy, seconded by Commissioner Surma, to recommend that City Council adopt Resolution #17-09-209 approving a Conditional Use Permit contingent upon the terms of the Conditional Use Permit and Zoning Code.

Motion Carried. Voting Yes: Chairperson Bauer, Commissioners VanScoy, Surma, Anderson, Gengler, and Nosan. Voting No: None. Absent: Commissioner Brauer.

5.02: Public Hearing: Consider Multiple Actions Related to a Request to Install and Maintain a Ground-Mounted Solar Energy System on the Property legally described as Lot 3, Block 1 River Crossing Addition (Project No. 17-135); Case of Connexus Energy.

- 1. Appeal for issuance of a Development Permit on an officially mapped parcel.**
- 2. Zoning Amendment to include Solar Energy Systems as a Principal Use with the issuance of a Conditional Use Permit in the Public/Quasi-Public District.**
- 3. Zoning Amendment to Rezone a Property from R-2 Residential to Public/Quasi Public.**
- 4. Conditional Use Permit to Install and Maintain a Solar Energy System.**

Public Hearing

Chairperson Bauer called the public hearing to order at 7:08 p.m.

Presentation

Community Development Director Gladhill presented the staff report stating Connexus Energy has applied for a Zoning Amendment and a Conditional Use Permit to construct a new solar garden on the property legally described as Lot 3, Block 1 River Crossing Addition (the "Subject Property"). The system would have the capability of producing 3.5 megawatts (MW) with ground mounted solar photovoltaic panels and would include 6 MW of battery energy storage. This is one of three (3) sites within Anoka County that Connexus Energy is developing to produce solar energy.

Community Development Director Gladhill reported the Subject Property is owned by Anoka County and would be leased by Connexus Energy. When the City contemplated solar energy systems several years ago, the Zoning Code was amended to consider ground or building mounted solar energy systems as a permitted accessory use in any zoning district. However, it did not account for, or address, the possibility of a solar energy system being the principal use of a property, as would be the case with Connexus' proposal.

Community Development Director Gladhill explained both the current zoning standards for solar energy systems and the information submitted by Connexus are attached for reference. The final

design plans are in the process of being prepared by the solar developer (based on site work being conducted now) but are not complete at this time. They have stated that they do not anticipate any major changes from the initial proposed layout and the Site Plan would still be subject to review and approval by the City. Staff stated the Environmental Policy Board recommended approval of the Zoning Amendments and Conditional Use Permit. City Staff also supports the recommended approvals as well as the appeal for the issuance of a development permit within an officially mapped area.

Citizen Input

Chairperson Bauer asked if the City had any zoning districts where solar energy systems were addressed.

Community Development Director Gladhill explained this was addressed within the City's employment districts. He did not anticipate the City would see another request of this size in a residential district.

Commissioner VanScoy questioned what the zoning was for the surrounding property.

Community Development Director Gladhill indicated the long-term goal of the City was to have the surrounding property be zoned R-2 Residential. He provided further comment on the City's Zoning Map.

Commissioner Anderson inquired if the City had any idea when the surrounding parcels will develop.

Community Development Director Gladhill explained one owner was considering development and the other had no plans. He anticipated that these parcels could not develop for another 10 to 20 years. He discussed how utilities were lacking in this area of the City.

Commissioner Nosan asked if there was any other solar farm in Minnesota located in a residential area.

Community Development Director Gladhill stated there were a variety of solar farms located in the State of Minnesota. He encouraged Connexus Energy to speak to this, but he reiterated that the requested solar farm would be installed prior to any residential housing.

Mike Bash, Connexus Energy Vice President and CFO, introduced himself to the Commission. He stated Connexus Energy was owned by its members and these members were looking for greener energy options. With solar energy expenses on the decline, Connexus was considering more renewable energy projects. He commented on other sites that were being considered for a solar farm, one being in Blaine and the other in St. Francis. He provided further information on his discussions with Anoka County on the proposed renewable energy project. He noted the solar farm would generate enough energy for 605 homes and estimated the solar farm would be in place for 25 years. He reported the solar farm would be planted with pollinator friendly plants. He discussed the location of other solar farms in the metro area.

Commissioner Anderson commented he was concerned about the glare coming from the solar farm.

Mr. Bash spoke to the small amount of glare that would be emitted by the solar panels. He explained numerous solar panels were located at airports and this was not a safety concern for arriving airplanes. He stated he has not noticed a glare coming from the existing solar farm in the past three years. He described how the solar farm would be landscaped to assist with reducing any glare issues.

Commissioner Anderson questioned if there have been any reports of scorched landscape or plants that were adjacent to solar farms.

Mr. Bash stated he was not aware of any instances in the entire country.

Commissioner VanScoy asked how many other sites Connexus has considered for the proposed solar farm.

Mr. Bash commented Connexus had considered a total of three other sites.

Commissioner Gengler inquired if the solar power projections were for a day, week, month or year.

Mr. Bash stated the projections were for a year.

Commissioner Surma asked if energy rates will begin to decline if more renewable energy sources are pursued.

Mr. Bash explained the cheapest energy source was wind. He commented on how the storage of solar energy would assist in slightly lowering overall energy prices.

Jan Groth, 15240 Kangaroo Street, commented on how crops were being affected by climate change.

Chairperson Bauer explained that climate change and solar farms were two totally different issues.

Jeff Nobbe, 8390 Highway 10, questioned why the City was considering changing the zoning of land for a 25-year time period. He believed this was taking away from potential future development and would change the landscape of the community. He did not anticipate the visitors on the bike trail would enjoy viewing the solar farm. He also feared how his property value would be adversely impacted by the proposed solar farm.

Jeff Pengro, 8390 Highway 10, asked if it was a tax benefit to have another solar farm in the City.

Community Development Director Gladhill commented on the tax rate for the 19-acre project site and noted Connexus Energy does pay property taxes.

Mr. Pengro believed the City would benefit more by placing homes in this area of the community than another solar farm.

Further discussion ensued regarding property values and tax rates.

Mr. Nobbe encouraged Connexus Energy to purchase their own parcel for the proposed solar farm as he did not want the value of his business to be reduced.

Dave Nathe, 14453 Llama Street, stated he has been farming this ground since 1971. He discussed the changes he has seen in the City over the years and noted the County purchased this land in two separate parcels for a river crossing. He believed that property values would be reduced as residential home buyers would not want to live adjacent to a solar farm. He feared that he would not be able to subdivide or develop his land. He encouraged Connexus Energy to pursue another location and for the Commission to not offer their support for the solar energy system.

Al Pearson, 14821 Bowers Drive, stated he had the same concerns as the others that have spoken against the solar farm. He questioned how much grading would occur on the site and stated he did not believe the solar farm would be a good fit. He explained he did not support tying up this property when opportunities for development could occur. He commented on the City's tax base and encouraged the City to consider the benefits of development versus a solar farm.

Mr. Bash commented on the personal property taxes that were paid by Connexus Energy. He explained no grading would occur on the site.

Community Development Director Gladhill stated this item could be brought back if the Commission has concerns with the economic development of this area.

Motion by Commissioner VanScoy, seconded by Commissioner Surma, to close the public hearing.

Motion Carried. Voting Yes: Chairperson Bauer, Commissioners VanScoy, Surma, Anderson, Gengler, and Nosan. Voting No: None. Absent: Commissioner Brauer.

Chairperson Bauer closed the public hearing closed at 8:14 p.m.

Commission Business

Commissioner Surma stated he would like to see the proposed solar farm placed on the Connexus Energy property along Sunwood Drive.

Commissioner Anderson questioned the size of this lot.

Community Development Director Gladhill reported the Connexus Energy lot was 17.5 acres in size.

Commissioner Nosan understood that solar energy was important. She explained she did have concerns about placing a solar farm in an area completely surrounded by residentially zoned parcels. She thanked the neighbors for voicing their concerns. She believed the Commission needed additional information on this request prior to moving forward and stated she would like to hear from the EDA.

Community Development Director Gladhill stated it may make sense to step back and work through the request in further detail, noting the Commission could postpone action on the solar farm to October.

Chairperson Bauer believed this was a reasonable course of action. He asked if postponement of the item would complicate matters for Connexus Energy.

Mr. Bash stated he would rather see the item postponed than denied. He explained he appreciated the questions that were being raised by the Commission and stated he could assist in researching answers with staff.

Motion by Commissioner Nosan, seconded by Commissioner VanScoy, to table action on the Connexus Energy solar farm to the October 12, 2017 Planning Commission meeting.

Further discussion

Commissioner VanScoy stated he fully supported solar power in Ramsey but indicated he was looking forward to hearing further from the EDA on this matter.

Motion Carried. Voting Yes: Chairperson Bauer, Commissioners Nosan, VanScoy, Anderson, Gengler, and Surma. Voting No: None. Absent: Commissioner Brauer.

5.03: Public Hearing: Consider Resolution #17-09-217 Granting a Variance to Front Yard Setback for Parking Lots and Resolution #17-09-218 Granting a Conditional Use Permit for Motor Vehicle Sales at 7103 Highway 10 NW (Project No. 17-140); Case of Motors on 10.

Public Hearing

Chairperson Bauer called the public hearing to order at 8:21 p.m.

Presentation

Community Development Director Gladhill presented the staff report stating the applicant is requesting a Variance and Conditional Use Permit. The request for Conditional Use Permit will allow the expansion of a parking lot to facilitate motor vehicle sales. For enforcement and review purposes, the City made motor vehicle sales a Conditional Use Permit in 2009. The request, overall, seems reasonable.

Community Development Director Gladhill reported the expansion shall require an easement with

the City for use of City-owned property for portions of the proposed stormwater improvements. The proposed expansion is deficient in front yard setbacks for parking lots. If the Planning Commission so desires, approval shall require the issuance of a Variance. The parcel is odd-shaped, and the building is screened from view from Highway 10. The City has had enforcement difficulties with past users of this parcel, using the unimproved area for display of vehicles for sale in violation of City Code. Expansion of the parking lot would improve the condition of the property and reduce the amount of enforcement action necessary on the parcel.

Community Development Director Gladhill stated staff recommends approval of the Conditional Use Permit to allow the expansion of the parking lot. The Planning Commission must decide if the request to variance to the 20 feet front yard setback (parking lot) is a reasonable request. The Applicant has stated that the built environment surrounding the parcel (the adjacent parcel to the west is lawful, non-conforming and does not have the 20-foot setback), that the request is reasonable. The Planning Commission is making the final decision on the request for Variance; it is not a recommendation to the City Council.

Citizen Input

Commissioner Anderson stated he visited the site today and understood a great deal of money had been spent to improve the site. He explained he supported the proposed request.

Motion by Commissioner Anderson, seconded by Commissioner Surma, to close the public hearing.

Motion Carried. Voting Yes: Chairperson Bauer, Commissioners Anderson, Surma, Gengler, Nosan, and VanScoy. Voting No: None. Absent: Commissioner Brauer.

Chairperson Bauer closed the public hearing closed at 8:25 p.m.

Commission Business

Motion by Commissioner Anderson, seconded by Commissioner VanScoy, to adopt Resolution #17-09-217 granting a Variance to Front Yard Setbacks for Parking Lots.

Motion Carried. Voting Yes: Chairperson Bauer, Commissioners Anderson, VanScoy, Gengler, Nosan, and Surma. Voting No: None. Absent: Commissioner Brauer.

Motion by Commissioner Gengler, seconded by Commissioner VanScoy, to recommend that City Council adopt Resolution #17-09-218 granting a Conditional Use Permit for Motor Vehicle Sales, contingent upon compliance with the Staff Review Letter.

Motion Carried. Voting Yes: Chairperson Bauer, Commissioners Gengler, VanScoy, Anderson, Nosan, and Surma. Voting No: None. Absent: Commissioner Brauer.

6. COMMISSION BUSINESS

6.01: Receive Update on Proposed Plat Known as Northfork Meadows located Near Puma Street and Alpine Drive; Case of Paxmar (Project No. 17-126).

Presentation

Community Development Director Gladhill presented the staff report stating the purpose of this case is to receive an update and provide general policy direction prior to the Developer (Paxmar) submitting a Preliminary Plat for official review. The City Council previously reviewed this case on June 27. Direction at that time was to host a public engagement workshop. The City Council noted two (2) topics to focus on:

1. Density Transitioning
2. Reliability/Consistency of the Comprehensive Plan

Community Development Director Gladhill reported the original concept has undergone Sketch Plan Review with the Planning Commission. The Planning Commission outlined a number of concerns indicated in the attached minutes from June 13. The City then held a public workshop on August 3, 2017. The City Council discussed next steps for review of this project on August 22nd. Concept #1 as outlined below was presented to the City Council. Subsequent to that discussion, the Developer provided a second concept to consider at this time (all 65-foot-wide, detached single-family lots, no detached townhomes). Staff provided a more detailed presentation of the requested and requested feedback from the Commission.

Commission Business

Chairperson Bauer summarized the comments made by the Planning Commission at a previous meeting. He asked if Paxmar would be willing to consider another parcel for their project to eliminate the need for a rezoning.

Kent Roessler, Paxmar Development, commented on the proposed development and stated all plans were preliminary in nature. He reported one parcel would be geared toward empty-nester villas. He noted the other parcel would be 132 units. He explained the proposed lot width (65 feet) was necessary in order to make this development economically possible. He understood there were a lot other parcels in the City that would accommodate 80-foot lots. He anticipated this parcel would have to sit and wait it out, if the Commission did not support the proposed lot width. He described how his proposed development would assisting in raising property values for surrounding property owners. He understood that this was only a sketch plan and noted he appreciated any feedback from the Commission.

Val Kruger, 15210 Kangaroo Street, stated she and her husband live just east to the proposed development and have lived there for the past 43 years. She expressed concern with the proposed amendment to the Comprehensive Plan. She did not support there being no buffer between her rurally zoned home and the proposed medium density subdivision. She commented that 93% of her neighbors have supported a petition that opposes the proposed project. She recommended the City uphold the Comprehensive Plan and current zoning for this site (low density residential). She

feared the proposed development was lacking green space and would greatly increase traffic in her neighborhood.

Chairperson Bauer questioned how many lots would be within the development if the project was low-density residential.

Mr. Roessler stated the project was originally 150+ lots and was scaled down to 132 lots. However, after hearing from the neighbors this project was reduced even further to 101 lots. He explained the project did not work financially with 80 foot lots as this would only yield 70 to 80 lots.

Leslie Clark, 15150 Kangaroo Street, asked if Paxmar would be willing to keep the 80-foot property width for the homes that will abut the existing neighborhood. She explained she did not have a large number of trees in her rear yard and was hoping she wouldn't have to look into a wall of homes.

Jan Groth, 15240 Kangaroo Street, commented the second proposal seemed a fit better given the size of the adjacent lots. She understood that the field would be built on at some point in the future, but stated the parcel was not zoned for 65-foot lots.

Community Development Director Gladhill understood PUD requirements and density transition were issues that still needed to be addressed by the City.

Commissioner Anderson questioned if the developer would consider having 80-foot lots adjacent to the existing homes.

Mr. Roessler stated on the east side of the development he could support having 80-foot lots if this would gain him neighborhood support. It was noted this would reduce the project by three lots.

Ms. Clark explained she opposed the development having townhome units on small lots. She stated her biggest concern was the need for a buffer or transition area between the new development and existing homes.

Ms. Kruger agreed a buffer between the two neighborhoods was key.

Commissioner VanScoy asked if any of the diagrams presented this evening met the Council's requests.

Community Development Director Gladhill stated the Council has not seen the most recent scenario with the wider and deeper lots.

Commissioner VanScoy stated he could not support a PUD at this time as he was not understanding the benefits to the City from the proposed project.

Mr. Roessler explained the benefits were the neighborhood would have covenants that would ensure high quality homes and building materials. In addition, he could dictate which homes got

built on which lots, while also requiring additional landscaping along the east property line. He commented on how he could work with the City on Puma Street.

Community Development Director Gladhill anticipated the City could continue to work with the applicant to refine the PUD further.

Mr. Roesser stated he was willing to compromise to have 80 foot lots along the east property line and would be willing to have additional screening in order to create a buffer.

Commissioner VanScoy encouraged staff to speak further with the applicant regarding the 80 foot lots along the east property line, along with a potential buffer.

Commissioner Nosan stated she was originally against this development, but was pleased how all parties were coming together to improve the buffer and spacing of the houses along the east property line.

Community Development Director Gladhill asked if the Commission was willing to support a Comprehensive Plan Amendment for the proposed project.

Commissioner VanScoy stated he would have difficulty supporting a Comprehensive Plan Amendment.

Chairperson Bauer thanked everyone for their input and he looked forward to all parties continuing to work to reach a compromise for this development.

6.02: Discussion Topic: Event Centers in Residential Areas (Ag Areas/Farms).

Presentation

Community Development Intern Henderson presented the staff report stating the purpose of this case is to get feedback from the Planning Commission on the topic of Event Centers in residential/agricultural areas, a request/inquiry that is becoming more frequent. Several cities in Minnesota have allowed accessory buildings to be used as event facilities via Conditional Use Permits and/or Interim Use Permits. Examples of events that may be held in such a structure include weddings and/or auctions (note these are just examples, other events may be offered too). Staff requested feedback on this matter.

Commission Business

Chairperson Bauer supported the City being proactive as he understood farm weddings were becoming increasingly more popular.

Commissioner Anderson stated his biggest concern was safety and to ensure buildings were properly inspected.

Commissioner VanScoy asked how an interim use permit would apply.

Community Development Director Gladhill explained the City could use either an interim use permit or conditional use permit for these uses.

6.03: Discussion Topic: Temporary Health Care Dwellings Units and Tiny Homes.

Presentation

Community Development Intern Henderson presented the Staff Report explaining the State passed legislation last session allowing Temporary Health Care Dwellings on single family residential lots. The City opted out as permitted by State Statute. However, the City Council wanted to revisit this topic and potentially develop the City's own set of standards to address them. The goal of this case is to open a discussion on how Ramsey should tackle Temporary Health Care Dwellings. This may also be an opportune time to evaluate the viability of Tiny Homes in Ramsey as well. Staff provided further comment on these uses and requested feedback from the Commission.

Commission Business

Chairperson Bauer understood temporary health care units and tiny homes were typically on wheels. He believed this issue needed to be looked into further. He stated he also wanted to better understand how the City would define “temporary”.

Commissioner Nosan discussed the differences between having a tiny home on a City sized lot versus acreage. She commented that tiny homes could grow in popularity in the coming years. She supported the Commission looking into the City’s requirements in further detail.

Commissioner VanScoy stated he would like to find a way to make tiny homes work in Ramsey, on a temporary basis.

Community Development Director Gladhill stated staff would bring this issue back to the Commission at a future meeting for further discussion.

7. COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE ITEMS

Community Development Director Gladhill provided the Commission with an update on the Comprehensive Plan.

8. COMMISSION / STAFF INPUT

8.01: Receive Staff Update

The Staff Update was noted.

8.02: Zoning Bulletins

Zoning Bulletins were noted.

9. ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Commissioner Anderson, seconded by Commissioner Surma, to adjourn the meeting.

Motion Carried. Voting Yes: Chairperson Bauer, Commissioners Anderson, Surma, Gengler, Nosan, and VanScoy. Voting No: None. Absent: Commissioner Brauer.

The regular meeting of the Planning Commission adjourned at 9:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Tim Gladhill
Community Development Director

ATTEST:

JoAnn Shaw
Community Development Assistant

Drafted by Heidi Guenther
TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.