

TOWN OF COTTAGE GROVE
PLAN COMMISSION
SEPTEMBER 22, 2021

- 1) Notice of the meeting was posted at the Town Hall and on the Town's internet site. A quorum was present with Kris Hampton, Steve Anders, Dave Muehl, Jerry Meylor, Troy Eickhoff, Mark Kudrna and Mike Klinger attending in person. Clerk Kim Banigan took minutes. The meeting was accessible virtually through gotomeeting.com.
- 2) Chair Kris Hampton called the meeting to order at 7:00 P.M.
- 3) Approve minutes of previous meetings: **MOTION** by Anders/Meylor to approve the minutes of the August 25, 2021 meeting as printed. **MOTION CARRIED 6-0-1** (Muehl abstained).
- 4) Public Concerns: Chris Dyer said he and his wife Heather, who was present virtually, are considering purchasing the property at 4075 Vilas Road as their residence, but they would also like to pursue a CUP for a limited family business to accommodate their association management business. He said all but the two of them work remotely. There would be no need for additional structures or equipment, no additional vehicle traffic, and no changes to prevent future agricultural use. They would be hosting meetings on site twice monthly. They would like to install sanitary fixtures, which seems as though it might be possible under the CUP but would need to be removed if the CUP expires. Long term wishes for the property included sale of produce grown on the property and Ag entertainment. There were no distinct objections to the limited family business idea, and they were directed to go ahead and apply if they so choose.
- 5) Dane County Solar, LLC, applicant, Dane County, Landowner: Applying for a Conditional Use Permit for a 20-MW solar facility on 178 acres (parcels 0711-302-9501-0, 0711-301-9040-3, 0711-302-8000-2, 0711-302-8500-7, 0711-193-9720-2, 0711-193-9350-0 along County AB and Hope and Femrite Roads): Bill French and Catie Malcheski were present representing Dane County Solar, LLC, along with Dave Merritt, Director of Policy and Program Development for Dane County Dept. of Administration, and Steve Greidanus and Pablo Jerez from Alliant Energy. Dane County Director of Planning and Development Todd Violante was present virtually. Merritt began by stating that in November 2020 the Dane County Executive and Alliant announced a project to develop 140 acres on County owned land to build a solar project that will enable the County to meet its goal of 100% renewable energy for County-owned facilities. Alliant has chosen Sunvest Solar (d.b.a. Dane County Solar, LLC) for the project, which will include 55,000 panels and generate 30,000 MW of energy each year, which he said could supply 4,500 homes and replace 14,000 tons of coal each year. Sunvest will own the project to the first 5 years, then sell it to Alliant. The County will continue to own and lease out the land, and will receive the renewable energy credits. The Town would be eligible for shared revenue once Alliant takes ownership. Bill French spoke next, and explained that the solar facility will actually cover 109 acres inside a 7-foot security fence. He described it as having a minimal impact, with little to no glare from the panels, which will be quiet during the day and silent at the night. No buildings or lighting will be added, there will be three access drives (2 on Femrite and one on Luds Lane), each with parking for 2-3 cars. There will be periodic routine maintenance and general maintenance twice per year, but all other monitoring is done remotely. Panels will move with the sun from east to west through the day. At maximum tilt, they will be 8 feet tall and 3 feet off the ground. They will be mounted on galvanized steel I-beams that can easily be pulled out of the ground at the end of the project. Central inverters will be located at each entrance, wires will most likely be hung vs. buried for easier maintenance and removal. The area below the panels will be seeded with a native flowering mix that will be mowed twice each year and spot treated with herbicides as needed.

Gary Gausmann represented the interests of Hope Lutheran Church, and was frustrated that the church already has to deal with the landfill to the west and is now being faced with this to the east. He suggested that a berm would shield the view, however French said they would prefer to use a landscape buffer that would be 6-7 feet high. Gausmann was also concerned about noise from the motors, and whether the panels

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release any pollutants. French said the panels are composed of all inert components.

Mike Niebuhr, 3124 Luds Lane, asked how this project fits with the plans to relocate County Highway AB. French was not aware of the plans, Merritt was but did not have any definitive answers.

Brian Pook, 3599 South Hope Road, was online and asked about batteries. French said none are proposed at this time, power is fed directly into the grid, to the substation near McFarland. Pook asked if there is a decibel rating for the motors that move the panels every 10 minutes to track the sun. He said panels are on a string, they don't all have their own motors. He did not know how many panels are on each string, or what the decibel rating is, but will find out.

Lori Pook, 3599 South Hope Road, was also online and expressed her objection to this request for a conditional use permit, stating that it will ruin the look and feel of the neighborhood. She said they moved here specifically to live in an agricultural neighborhood.

Hampton asked about stormwater control, French said they will work through the requirements with the County, but they are not anticipating any since there will be no impervious surfaces added.

Anders asked how the vertical expansion of the landfill will affect the efficiency of the panels. French did not have an answer but will find out.

Eickhoff asked how heavy snow affects the efficiency of the panels. French said snow tends to slough off pretty easily, ice can be a bigger issue. Weather conditions are taken into account when efficiency ratings are calculated. Eickhoff also asked if deep snow hampers the tilting of the panels. Greidanus said the panels they plan to use will stop tilting if they hit snow, so it may affect efficiency but will not damage panels or motors. Being 3 feet off the ground, this is not usually a problem.

Jeff Wilson, 2889 Wittewood Lane, asked if any assessment of effects on property values has been made? French said assessments of other projects found they did not affect property values, other than for a brief period during construction. Wilson also asked the timeline for construction, French said they hope to start in the Spring of 2022, would take about 5 months, and would be done in a single phase. All staging will take on the property itself. No roads will be closed.

MOTION by Hampton/Anders to table until October 27th to allow the Clerk to publish the required notices.
MOTION CARRIED 7-0.

- 6) Continued discussion on the update to the Comprehensive Plan, focusing on an opportunity for Plan Commission members to provide comments on the draft Land Use chapter of the Visions and Directions volume and the draft Future Land Use map provided for the August meeting: Hampton reiterated his question from last month about how the Town should go about balancing community interest in land use with preservation of landowner rights. There was a long discussion focused mostly on lot sizes, with thoughts that larger lots could provide the feeling of still being in the country.

The Utilities and Community Facilities Timetable on Figure 10 of the Visions and Directions volume were reviewed. All studies should be possible by 2030 rather than 2020.

Comprehensive Plan Priority Programs on Figure 11 were also reviewed. The Commission wanted to add a priority for maintaining the Koshkonong Creek. They thought that Agricultural Enterprise Areas needed to be initiated by landowners, and indicated they would support any such requests. They wondered if one could be used to block large solar installations. They questioned why the Town would prioritize seeking an amendment to the County Farmland Preservation Plan, and what exactly bio-based businesses entail. The

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priority to learn about the Village's "Koshkonong Creek Parkway" should be eliminated as this does not exist. The Village of McFarland should be included under intergovernmental cooperation. Amendments to the Comp Plan should be considered every other year vs. annually, with the next full update in 2030.

- 7) Continued discussion on width requirements for future roads to allow for walking and/or bike paths, focusing on advice from the Greater Madison MPO: Discussion was that only arterial roads would make sense to be wider. Hampton suggested adding 3' paved lanes on each side of the usual 24' of paved surface, with 2-3' gravel shoulders. This would leave 15' of right-of-way on each side for ditches. The Clerk was directed to ask the Town Engineer if this would be enough for stormwater, to be reported at the next meeting.
- 8) ADJOURNMENT: **MOTION** by Muehl/Meylor to adjourn. **MOTION CARRIED 7-0**. The meeting was adjourned at 9:15 P.M.

Submitted by: Kim Banigan, Clerk
Approved 10-24-2021