

ISABELLA COUNTY
PLANNING COMMISSION
AMENDED AGENDA

March 14, 2024

A regular meeting of the Isabella County Planning Commission was held on March 14, 2024 at the Isabella County Commission on Aging Building, 2200 S. Lincoln Rd., Mt. Pleasant, Michigan.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Tim O'Neil, Ann Silker, Steve Swaney, Adam Brookens, Lisa Hoisington, Bob Campbell, Kyle Camp

MEMBERS ABSENT: Kelly Bean, Phillip Vogel

SUPPORT STAFF PRESENT: Ray Johnson, Planner/Zoning Administrator
Mackenzie Rahl, Administrative Assistant, Recording Secretary

The meeting was called to order by Mr. O'Neil at 6:00 pm.

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited by the members.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

A motion was made by Mr. Camp, supported by Mr. Swaney to approve the agenda.

Yes: Tim O'Neil, Ann Silker, Steve Swaney, Adam Brookens, Lisa Hoisington, Bob Campbell, Kyle Camp

No: None

Motion to Approve Carried

PREVIOUS MINUTES

Minutes of the February 8, 2024 regular meeting were circulated to the members prior to the meeting for their review.

A motion was made by Mr. Swaney, supported by Mr. Campbell to approve the minutes.

Yes: Tim O'Neil, Ann Silker, Steve Swaney, Adam Brookens, Lisa Hoisington, Bob Campbell, Kyle Camp

No: None

Motion to Approve Carried

LIAISON REPORTS

Zoning Board of Appeals – None

Parks & Recreation – None.

Board of Commissioners – Mr. Swaney stated the Board of Commissioners discussed general items and steps for hiring new employees.

TOWNSHIP CONCERNS

Denver Township – Ms. Jackie Curtis indicated that the Township is quiet.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Opened at 6:05 p.m.

Sheila Salmon 10329 E Deerfield Rd - Read a prepared statement (attached) about farmland and her opposition to Solar Farms. She also indicated some concerns about noise from solar farms.

Closed at 6:11 p.m.

PUBLIC HEARINGS – None

OTHER BUSINESS (NON-PUBLIC HEARINGS)

SITE PLAN REVIEW #24-03 JBS Contracting/Fair Family Trust – Vernon Township

Mr. Johnson reviewed the his staff report and the application submitted by JBS Contracting/Fair Family Trust. He indicated that Mr. JBS Contracting/Fair Family Trust provided a site plan showing the layout of the proposed expansion. He indicated that after review the application appeared to be complete and meet all requirements of the zoning ordinance.

Mr. Johnson read the following recommended stipulations for the record, and asked that if an approval was going to be made these stipulations be included.

1. A permit for the well and septic from the Central Michigan District Health Department shall be provided.
2. A permit or approval on the proposed driveways from the Isabella County Road Commission shall be provided.
3. Screening shall be installed as depicted and described on the site plan.

Mr. O'Neil called for a motion.

A motion was made by Mrs. Silker to approve Site Plan Review #24-03 as submitted by JBS Contracting on behalf of Fair Family Trust. to establish a vehicle maintenance and storage building in the General Agricultural (AG-2). The approval shall be further conditioned upon the following:

1. A permit for the well and septic from the Central Michigan District Health Department shall be provided.
2. A permit or approval on the proposed driveways from the Isabella County Road Commission shall be provided.
3. Screening shall be installed as depicted and described on the site plan.

The motion was seconded by Mr. Swaney.

Mr. O'Neil called for discussion.

Mr. Brookens asked if screening was required along the east property line.

Mr. Johnson stated that it wasn't since the adjacent property is farm field and owned by Fair Family Trust.

Hearing no discussion, Mr. O'Neil called for a vote.

Yes: Tim O'Neil, Ann Silker, Steve Swaney, Adam Brookens, Lisa Hoisington, Bob Campbell, Kyle Camp

No: None

Motion to Approve Carried

Village of Lake Isabella-Master Plan Notice of Intent

Mr. Johnson indicated that a notice of intent was received from the Village of Lake Isabella which indicated the Village would be amending their Master Plan. He also informed the members that once an amended plan was received from the village, he would ensure it would be on a future agenda for their review and comment.

PUBLIC COMMENT – Opened at 6:21 p.m. Closed at 6:21 p.m.

STAFF COMMENTS – None

PLANNING COMMISSIONER'S COMMENTS –

Mr. Swaney stated that at the last Board of Commissioners meeting it was noted that the jail construction is over 50% finished.

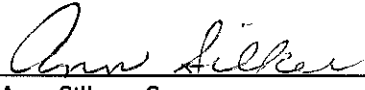
ADJOURNMENT

Mr. O'Neil adjourned the meeting at 6:22 PM

Planning Commission

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A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Ann Silker", is written above a horizontal line.

Ann Silker, Secretary

Mackenzie Rahl, Recording Secretary

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This is my land, I should get to do whatever I want on it right? If I want a “tiny home” or solar panels for my farm or project cars on cinderblocks in my yard for years and display my junky collections for the rest of the neighborhood to enjoy, that’s my right! Right? NO, I have heard planning commissions deliberate on these issues MORE than talk about the solar projects on farmland. As I mentioned to you back in January, private agricultural land is dwindling at an unprecedented pace, this is not just a local issue, this is happening all over!! Solar fields on farmland are the locust and the swarm is devouring our most valuable asset. The United States agriculture is what made this country great and the ruling system is trying to bring us down. While this might be a speech for a much broader audience, YOU have a chance to make a difference for Isabella County!

I had a conversation with one of our representatives who heard one of my speeches. He said that he supported what I was saying, but then stated that he “cannot begrudge a farmer for putting solar panels on their farmland.” My response was “I can begrudge a farmer for putting solar panels on their farmland because of the noise of the inverters and what I might have to see out my back door.” His response to me was “that is why we have setbacks, to make it more “tolerable” for the residents.” I don’t want to just “tolerate” my HOME, I want to enjoy my home, people move to the country to get away from noise, to get away from machinery, to enjoy the farms, the fields that grow crops, to be surrounded by things that are natural. Solar panels on farmland are unnatural, inefficient, unproductive and ugly; I should get to enjoy what I moved out to the country for. For many counties they already have to tolerate the turbines! I do not want my rights violated by my neighbor’s intentions, and I urge this body of decision makers to implement the strictest rules so that I can enjoy my home, my land, so that I can be free from potential environmental risks.

We have never seen the full life cycle of a solar field. The ones in Gratiot County are already having problems and the project is only in its infancy. The landowners sign non-disclosure agreements, but they all talk and the talk and frustrations are being spread about top soil being removed, taken completely off the land, trucked to who knows where; frustrations on products from other countries being inferior and the project is on hold until replacement parts are found. 80% of solar panels come from China and I assume that the inferior parts are from China as well. I think we can all guess who benefits the most from solar panels on farmland! It’s not the taxpayers whose money is subsidizing the energy companies, it is not the non-participating property owners who have no say, and though the farmers that

signed the leases think they will have a big payout coming, in the end they will lose too. Ultimately, when all is said and done, the biggest loser of all will be our children and grandchildren and descendants to come who will have to deal with the repercussions of what is left behind. Let's just say for arguments sake that the goals of 100% renewable energy from wind and solar are achieved by 2040 or 2050. By then many of the leases will be nearing the end of their term, do you honestly believe that land will ever be allowed to return to private hands? Once they are connected to the grid, it is my belief that the energy companies and/or the government will claim "common carrier" status and take over the land with eminent domain.

I talked to a young man recently who worked on the solar farms going in. His statement to me was that "if this was his land, he would never sign up for this" and "that land will never go back into farmland." Is this ok with you? Are my words falling on deaf ears like many people are telling me? Am I wasting my time? Or are you listening, but feel powerless to fight back against the state? I believe we will repeal the zoning issue in November, and then it will be a little easier to deal with. However, I am under the impression that many townships and counties feel they cannot be more strict than the state. I can promise you that you can't go wrong in implementing strict ordinances for your communities. If the appeal of the money is what motivates you, consider this, that right now Gratiot County is having issues with the depreciation of the wind turbines and the money might not always be there. Additionally, there are rumors of a solar site in Gladwin where the company is not paying the landowners. Of course this is just hearsay, but someone might want to check that out!

You need to be aware that right now Clinton County has nearly 6000 acres of solar panels going in on farmland with more leases being signed. The trend is that once people find out what is going on in their peaceful countryside's they become upset and start protesting. Gratiot county has many upset people starting to wake up and are asking to have their weak ordinance revised and to implement stricter rules be put in place for the non-participating property owners and residents and I urge Isabella County to do the same. I am not sure where you are at with your solar ordinance, whether it has been set or not. If it has not it is better to have a strict ordinance now rather than amend it later. If the ordinance has been set, this might be a good time to pause, review and revise.

You have a duty to protect the landowners who want to sign a lease, by ensuring their land will be protected and restored to its former use. Many solar companies use hydrolic fluid to move their conduit underground, hydrolic fluid that if anything happened would ruin the soil. I question what is in the panels themselves because at the end of their life they are considered hazardous waste. Why would we put this on our farm land.

EXAMPLES OF STRICT ORDINANCES...

300 foot set backs, berms around non participating residences, six foot evergreens (not the puny arborvitae), chain link fencing with green mesh on all sides, no more than 40 decibel for noise pollution, inverters in the middle of the fields, dual use requirements, stipulations that EACH PARCEL rather than each block of land ownership to have it's own set backs, no foreign material that is not already on the land to be added and no soil to be removed.

Recently I drove around the site in North Star...if I am reading it correctly, according to the ordinance in Gratiot County, there is supposed to be chain link fence around all of the fields however, that was not the case. One field had chain link, only one out of all of them that I saw. Whose responsibility is it to make sure the company is following the rules? Who is going to monitor the progress or lack thereof?

I have heard a planning team member say they "have worked long and hard on their ordinance and we are not going to change it now" and this is before any public hearing has been held on the subject. Does anything the residents of this county have to say make any difference? While I do understand about the wind and solar "renewable energy" zoning law that the State of Michigan voted on and implemented, it is also my understanding that we have until November before it is really enforced. However, I believe that the effort to repeal this law through petition signing will be successful and we will be able to vote on it in November. We cannot let the powers that be control the outcome of projects in our townships and counties. We need to plan that this right that they are trying to take from us will be restored and act accordingly.

While I do believe in harnessing the elements available to us for our energy needs, we are just not there yet with solar panels due to the technology, engineering and land usage requirements. Furthermore, advances in technology

will render current solar panels obsolete in just a couple of years, these solar panels cannot go into regular landfills, they are considered hazardous waste!

I was last here back in January to talk to you about the devastating effects of solar panels on farmland. At that time this planning commission had stated that there were none on the books at that time however, since Coe township has been targeted I feel that there are probably many townships under the counties umbrella that are possibly being targeted as well.

It might be wise to review the ordinances in Fulton and Seville townships in Gratiot County and here in Isabella county, Wise Township. I urge you to contact the supervisor for Pine River township in Gratiot county to inquire about the progress of the solar going in down there.

Everyone should examine every type of precaution to protect the non participating residents and the future of the farm land. A lot of people do not know what is happening until it is too late. However, if there was a headline on the front page of tomorrows paper or broadcast on television, that shared the details of when and where a solar field was going in, well in advance of a lease and construction, we all know that there would be many concerned citizens protesting and asking for protections for their health and safety and assurances that strict rules be put in place and followed. Sadly, the news is in the back section of the paper barely even noticed.

-Sheila Salmon

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