

ATHENS TOWNSHIP
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
7:00 pm Athens Township Government Center
Minutes of TUESDAY, February 20, 2018

1. *Pledge of Allegiance:* The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.
2. *Roll Call:* The meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm by Chairman Dave Beckstrom. Members present were Dan Woodfill, Dave Henderson, Dave Beckstrom, Cindy Anderson, and Jake Carpenter. Also present was Zoning Administrator, Ryan Gritman, and applicant Andrew Dahlen from SoCore Energy.

Not present: Marlys Balfany

3. *Open Forum:* Beckstrom opened the public forum. Seeing no residents present for the open forum, Beckstrom closed the public forum.
4. *Public Hearings:*

- a. **SoCore Energy – Zoning Text Amendment to allow solar farms as a conditional use in Athens Township**

Planner Gritman gave his report dated February 16, 2018 and stated that there are two issues he's like to see discussed at the meeting tonight, one is screening and what the Town should require, the other is the setback requirement. Planner Gritman stated he would like to hear from the Planning Commission on their thoughts for changes or additions to the zoning text amendment.

Chair Beckstrom said that he spoke with the Town Attorney and the Town can include language that allows solar farms 12 months to begin construction, even though all other conditional use permits only allow six months.

Chair Beckstrom said he spoke with the City of Scandia about what issues they had and stated that they told him they had issues with residents wanting more screening; and were concerned about property values.

Chair Beckstrom said we should discuss height limitations of structures, and that we should have a decommissioning agreement with the developer of a solar farm and possibly having a bond by the developer.

Chair Beckstrom said that setbacks could be an issue.

Planner Gritman stated he has Isanti County and Chisago County for comparison to the proposed text amendment.

Commissioner Henderson said that the sample developer's agreement has a decommission escrow and fencing escrow. The Town's fencing limitation is 6 feet, and the proposed text amendment would be an exception because it would be higher.

Commissioner Henderson asked if we need a developer's agreement and a resolution.

Andrew Dahlen of SoCore Energy stated that they typically see any requirements in the conditions or approval such as screening.

Commissioner Henderson stated that zoning regulations would have general regulations, and a developer's agreement would have specific conditions.

Mr. Dahlen stated that they will be doing fixed system.

Chair Beckstrom said we could have the screening language say that it can't be visible from other property.

Chair Beckstrom asked about security fencing for a potential project.

Mr. Dahlen stated that it would be seven or eight feet in height, whichever is deemed necessary.

Chair Beckstrom asked what they need to keep out.

Mr. Dahlen replied that it's in the National Electric Code.

Commissioner Anderson asked if they've ever seen a case where animals got into the enclosure.

Mr. Dahlen said that he's not seen that happen.

Mr. Dahlen asked for an edit to say "if the applicant can show the panels are not visible, then screening can be waived.

Commissioner Anderson asked if they have a location in mind for this project.

Mr. Dahlen said it is off of University Avenue.

Chair Beckstrom asked if there are wetlands on the site.

Mr. Dahlen said there are some wetlands, but they will be planning the project around them.

Chair Beckstrom said we should have a setback from buildings in the ordinance.

Commissioner Henderson said we need to consider glare and the topography of the property.

Mr. Dahlen said that property with a steep grade is typically not doable, and that the property needs to be flat in order to install solar panels. Typically, five to ten percent grade at most.

The Planning Commission made changes to the proposed ordinance and directed Staff to update the draft ordinance.

Commissioner Henderson made a motion to table the two zoning ordinance proposals to a special meeting on February 26, 2018 at 7:00 pm at the Athens Township Hall. Motion seconded. Motion passed on a vote of 4-0.

5. *Adjournment:* Commissioner Woodfill made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Motion seconded. Meeting adjourned at 9:15 pm.

Minutes approved on this 28th day of February, 2018.



Ryan Gritman, Zoning Administrator



Dave Beckstrom, Planning Chair