

ATHENS TOWNSHIP  
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING  
7:00 pm Athens Township Government Center  
Minutes of Thursday May 17, 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 Marlys Balfany, Dave Henderson, Dave Beckstrom, Cindy Anderson. Also present was Zoning Administrator, Ryan Grittman.

Not present: Jake Carpenter, Dan Woodfill

3. *Minutes of April 19, 2018:* A motion to approve the minutes as amended (note changes below) was made by Henderson, motion seconded. Motion carried unanimously. 3-0

For item number two, Jake Carpenter was not present at the meeting.

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

- a. SoCore Energy – CUP – to allow a Solar Farm at PID 01.101.2101 and 01.101.2102

Planner Grittman gave his report and explained that Solar Farms are allowed by conditional use permit. He explained that conditional use permits have two criteria to review, one is the general criteria that all conditional use permits are reviewed against, and a second that is specific to the application. In reviewing the general requirements, the application was consistent with the Township's requirements.

Planner Grittman then stated that Staff compared the proposed project to the requirements that are specific to solar farm projects. In review of these requirements, Staff found that the proposed project is consistent with the Township's requirements.

Commissioner Henderson noted that the plan narrative says that no hazardous materials will be onsite, but the budget that was submitted shows hazardous material removal.

Brian Burandt of Connexus Energy stated that it's for the transformer removal, and the oil that's in them.

Mr. Burandt gave a brief presentation and stated that Connexus Energy is a co-op and that customers have been requesting renewable energy without increasing the rates. The solar panels will have battery storage to supply energy during peak demand times.

Chair Beckstrom opened the public hearing and asked for comments and questions from the public.

Scott Hughes of 47 268th Lane NE asked about the residents of Athens, and what's in it for Athens since Connexus Energy covers other counties.

Mr. Burandt stated that Connexus covers seven counties and that Connexus will pay taxes on the system to Isanti County and Athens Township and it will be different than the agricultural tax.

Chair Beckstrom stated that all the power produced will be for Connexus Energy.

Tim Swanson of 24612 Ulysses Street said that solar is more expensive because the infrastructure has about a 20-year payback and solar did not work in Nevada. He stated that the cost per kilowatt hour is the same, so why solar energy?

Mr. Burandt stated that the membership wants solar energy. He said that the batteries will store energy for peak times.

Mr. Swanson said he doesn't see a reduction in costs.

Mr. Burandt stated that they are not allowed to do the project unless it will not raise costs.

Mr. Swanson asked what's in the solar panels that makes them work.

Silica and an inverter to convert to AC power for battery storage.

Margaret Damann of 26727 University Avenue NE asked how long until the solar panels are up and running.

Spencer from NextEra Energy stated that it will be operational by the end of year.

Margaret Damann asked how long construction will take.

Spencer stated that it'll be around 3 months.

Margaret Damann asked how many panels are going in.

Mr. Burandt stated that there will be 26,000 panels

Commissioner Henderson asked about how the pilings will be put in the ground.

Spencer stated that they will be pneumatic pilings.

Chair Beckstrom asked about time of day for installation.

Cecilia Wolf of SoCore Energy stated that 7:00 am to 7:00 pm is the typical schedule.

Mr. Hughes asked if this was a forgone conclusion that this project will be built. He stated that he only received his first letter about the project. He asked why this site was chosen. He stated he's concerned about the process.

Chair Beckstrom stated that the Township received an application for an ordinance amendment back in December. The Ordinance has been passed by the Board.

Mr. Hughes stated that there are better properties for this project.

Chair Beckstrom stated that the Township receive the application from the applicant and we have to consider it as proposed.

Billy Larson of 440 273th Avenue NE asked how many pilings will be driven.

Spencer stated that it'll be about 3 weeks

Commissioner Balfany asked if people in the audience are for or against the project.

Mr. Hughes said he's not against it; but was concerned about the noticing and the fact that this is the first time he's heard of the project. Mr. Hughes asked about which newspapers it was published in.

Chair Beckstrom said it was published in the Isanti County News.

Mr. Larson said he's concerned about construction and the noise.

Spencer stated that there will be noise, but once it's done it will not make noise and not have traffic.

Mr. Burandt said that it's the equivalent of a home air conditioning unit once it's completed and operating.

Commissioner Balfany asked Margaret Damann how she feels about the project.

Margaret Damann said it's ok, she's for it.

Margaret Damann asked about resale value of neighboring properties.

Chair Beckstrom said that we did some research and we could not find any evidence of negative impacts on neighboring property values.

Chair Beckstrom thanked everyone for their input and closed the public hearing.

Commissioner Anderson asked how deep the pilings will go.

Spencer stated that they're typically between 8 feet and 12 feet, maybe deeper if needed. It depends on the soil conditions.

Mr. Hughes asked if there was an environment impact study done.

Chair Beckstrom said that they're doing bee friendly plantings for prairie restoration.

Mr. Hughes said that this could have been handled a lot better.

Chair Beckstrom said that this project fell between newsletter issues.

Commissioner Henderson said we need to discuss the hours and dust control.

Chair Beckstrom said we could have crew onsite at 7am, and no driving pilings before 8am.

Commissioner Balfany asked about weekdays and weekend production.

Commissioner Henderson said that we should have no noise on Sunday.

Chair Beckstrom said we should add a condition for prep work to start at 7am, pneumatics can be done 8am to 7pm and no pneumatics on Sundays.

Commissioner Henderson said that the pilings should be limited to 8am to 7pm on weekdays, Saturdays 8am to 2pm, and no pneumatics on Sundays. All other construction can be done 7 days a week, from 7am to 7pm.

Chair Beckstrom asked about the developer's agreement.

Mr. Burandt stated that It will be a condition of approval of the conditional use permit.

Commissioner Henderson asked about a bond or escrow for decommissioning plan

Mr. Burandt said that part of lease agreement is they will return the site to natural vegetation when the project has been completed.

Commissioner Balfany stated that if we have a bond, we have to watch it, so it won't expire.

Commissioner Balfany asked about dust control.

Mr. Burandt said it will be part of the construction standard practices.

Commissioner Henderson said that dust control can be in the developer's agreement.

*Commissioner Henderson made a motion to approve the conditional use permit with the conditions outlined in the Planner's Report dated May 13, 2018 as follows:*

1. *The applicants enter into a Developer's Agreement with the Township.*
2. *The applicants adhere to any recommendations by the Electrical Inspector.*
3. *The applicants adhere to any recommendations by the Township Building Official.*
4. *The applicants adhere to the landscaping plan as submitted for review.*
5. *The applicants install security fencing at least eight (8) feet in height.*
6. *The applicants screen the site according to the regulations set forth by Athens Zoning Ordinance 20-34 7.*

*And the following conditions:*

7. *Construction can take place onsite from 7am to 7pm, seven days a week.*
8. *Pneumatic pile driving can only be done 8am to 7pm, Monday through Friday.*

9. *Pneumatic pile driving can only be done 8am to 2pm, on Saturdays.*
10. *No pneumatic pile driving can be done on Sundays.*

*Motion Seconded. Chair Beckstrom asked if there was any further discussion. Hearing none, Chair Beckstrom called for a vote. All members voting in favor. Motion Passed 3-0*

b. Ordinance Amendment for Home Occupations

Planner Grittman gave his report and stated that the Planning Commission had tabled action on this ordinance amendment for one change that specifies how building size is calculated. This will also match the County's ordinance.

*Commissioner Henderson made motion to approve home occupations ordinance and home occupation in accessory structure. Motion seconded. All members voting in favor. Motion passed 3-0*

*Commissioner Henderson made a motion to table private road easement amendment. Motion seconded. All members voting in favor. Motion passed. 3 – 0*

6. *Old Business:*

a. PC seat:

Chair Beckstrom stated that they have some candidates. Chair Beckstrom stated that any board member can nominate someone; the Board member would do so by making a recommendation and then there would be a vote. This is how he'll recommend the Board handle the vacant seat.

Chair Beckstrom also mentioned that there are others who have expressed interest, if any Board member wants to nominate them, they can do so.

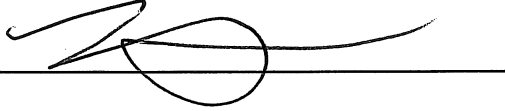
7. Miscellaneous

- a. Commissioner Anderson asked about doing temp signs for cleanup day advertising to help with traffic flow.
- b. Commissioner Anderson asked about the roads.

Chair Beckstrom said that the road review was completed recently are they are in great shape. There were some fixes, and the company that's doing maintenance is doing a great job.

8. *Adjournment: Commissioner Balfany made a motioned to adjourn. Motion seconded. All members voting in favor on a vote of 3-0. Meeting adjourned at 8:43 pm.*

Minutes approved on this 21st day of June 2018.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'R' followed by a horizontal line that loops back under the 'R'.

Ryan Grittman, Zoning Administrator

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Dave Beckstrom' written in a cursive style.

Dave Beckstrom, Planning Chair