

## MANCHESTER TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION

Manchester Township Hall, 275 S. Macomb, Manchester, Michigan 48158

Public Hearing Minutes – April 21, 2022

7:00 PM

A. CALL TO ORDER BY CHAIR

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Mike Walter at 7:00 PM. Members Present: Mike Walter, George Daubner, Dave Thompson, Doug Brooks, Ashley Buniack, Sybil Kolon and John Seefeld. Members Absent: None.

Others Present: John Enos, Carlisle-Wortman, planning commission consultant; Frank Krawczel and others with the Applicant, AES; Ron Milkey, Township Supervisor; Kim Thompson, Township Treasurer; Krista Jarvis, Township Trustee; Mike Fusilier, Township Trustee; Carl Macomber, Zoning Administrator; 53 members of the public signed in, most of whom were adjacent or nearby residents.

B. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

A motion was made by Thompson, second by Kolon to approve the agenda as presented. **Motion carried.**

C. STATEMENT OF REASON FOR HEARING

Chairman Walter read the following statement: This meeting is for the purpose of receiving public comment on a proposed large scale solar facility located on the east side of Sharon Hollow Road and bisected on the north and south side of Herman Road. An application has been submitted for a Utility-Scale Solar Energy System (SES), known as the Thorn Lake Solar Project, on one hundred and fifty-nine (159) acres of undeveloped, agricultural land.

PRESENTATION BY THE APPLICANT

Frank Krawczel, with AES, introduced staff who are working on the project and they provided a summary of the project. AES is a global company. His team is focused on producing renewable energy in the Midwest. They own and operate their projects. The energy produced will be under contract with Consumers Energy. They expect to start construction in the fall of 2023 and to complete it by the end of 2024. It will produce 39,500 megawatt hours per year, enough to power 5,100 homes. The panels will have anti-reflective coating and will be mounted on poles driven into ground. There will be no foundations.

The maximum height of the panels will be 16 feet. The set back will be a minimum of 50 feet as required by the ordinance. The project currently specifies a six-foot chain-link fence with barbed wire on top. They understand the concern with barbed wire and will consider a seven-foot chain-link fence. The overhead distribution lines are not part of this project. It will be constructed by Consumers Energy.

There are no unique soils, regulated wetlands or endangered species. They will minimize tree clearing. During construction they will use water trucks to reduce dust. There will be 200 to 250 construction workers for about a year. Once constructed there will be very little activity. The land will be restored to its original condition for agriculture when the project is completed after 35 years.

They are usually the largest taxpayer in their communities and have a minimal need for services. This is a \$30 million investment. Tax revenue of \$5 million will be generated for the county and township over 35 years compared to \$400,000 in its current use.

There will be remote monitoring; few problems are expected. Staff will be on call as needed. There will be routine maintenance, including mowing, possibly sheep grazing later after vegetation is established. The local fire department will have access.

They want to be a community partner and they have contributed to local activities such as the Manchester chicken broil. They had a virtual open house last year that was advertised locally. They sent letters to neighbors about the project within 300 feet, though that is not required of them.

The landscaping plan calls for trees planted 30 feet on center and two rows of alternating evergreens to block the view on curve of road. They showed visual representations of how the site would look after construction.

#### INTRODUCTION BY PLANNING CONSULTANT

John Enos, the township's planner, summarized the workings of the planning commission and the zoning ordinance. This application is a conditional use. The application was reviewed to determine if it meets the requirements of the ordinance. The review so far indicates the application meets the requirements. A public hearing is required by the ordinance. The commission will consider public comments and may or may not make a decision tonight. The township board is not involved in this decision, it is up to the planning commission to decide.

#### D. PUBLIC COMMENT

There were many comments by the public, all of which were opposed to the proposed project, including comments about how the project could be improved if it is constructed.

- Recycling the materials when it is decommissioned is a potential problem.
- Several comments indicated their property values will be negatively affected.
- There is no benefit to the community; most of the taxes will not come to Manchester Township.
- There was concern for the loss of agricultural land.

- Many people want the vegetative buffers to be bigger, with larger trees being planted to create a visual buffer sooner. It will take years for small trees to get big enough to provide a buffer. They should have a berm as part of the buffer.
- Deciduous trees will not provide a good buffer; evergreens should be used.
- There is no vegetative buffer along many areas, including along Herman Road.
- Will noxious weeds be a problem? Will they use herbicides and provide notification to neighbors?
- The project would detract from the attractiveness of the area.
- The project does not belong here.
- The project would be an eyesore they can see from their property.
- A chain link fence with barbed wire on each side of Herman Road will make it look like a prison.
- Will they contribute to repairing damage to the roads from heavy trucks during construction?
- Several people have bought nearby lots recently or started building their dream homes and they did not know about this proposed project.
- All of the trees on both sides of Herman Road were cut down and it is now unsightly.
- People are concerned more solar projects will be built.
- There was concern about the noise from converting the direct current to alternating current.
- There will be noise during construction.
- They started construction recently by installing pilings before the project was approved, which is a violation. They were removed the next day.
- There is concern about the future of the company; they may sell to another company or might go bankrupt. It was stated that China owns a portion of AES.
- Manchester Township may have to fund decommissioning if the project fails. Chairman Walter stated there will be a bond for decommissioning.
- Manchester Township did not follow all of the requirements of the zoning ordinance.
- Since the project needs access to the internet, will they provide internet to the area?
- There is concern about security lighting disrupting the darkness at night.
- There is concern about the power line that will be installed to transfer the energy generated to another location; where will it be installed and how big will it be?
- Someone mentioned the length of the lease with the property owner is 35 years, but the contract with Consumers Energy is for only 20 years. What will happen for 15 years after that?
- There is concern for glare and distraction of drivers on the curve from Herman Road to Sharon Hollow Road.
- Someone was concerned that trees on their property would have to be cut down to allow access.

- Someone mentioned a solar facility near Cement City that is being put in by AES that does not look like a well-constructed project.

#### RESPONSE BY APPLICANT

- The application meets all of the requirements of the township zoning ordinance and state law.
- There are facilities available for recycling materials at the end of the project.
- They are willing to look into increasing the buffer, though the site plan does meet the requirements of the ordinance.
- AES has no control over how the property taxes on the project will be distributed.
- The noise from construction will be relatively short in terms of the length of the project.
- Lighting will be minimal, only lights on motion sensors at the gates; they will point downward and will be shielded.
- They will follow an invasive species management and vegetation plan. Staff will be trained to recognize invasive species. If they use herbicides they will communicate with neighbors. They try to avoid use of herbicides. They may hire contractors to maintain the vegetation. The full landscaping plan will be developed as the project moves forward.
- They normally have an agreement with the road commission to address any damage to the roads. They will do a survey of road conditions before they begin construction.
- The inverters that convert the power are located within the project area and are not very loud.
- The solar facility near Cement City that was mentioned is not theirs.
- The pilings that were installed was an investigation to determine what materials and methods should be used to install the posts for the panels. That process requires a brief installation to analyze the conditions.
- There will be an entrance on Herman Road, the other will be on Sharon Hollow Road, which will be their main entrance.
- The power line to transfer the energy from the project will be built by Consumers Energy and is not part of this application.
- They normally contract out internet service about eight months before project completion. They would consider coordinating additional service but are uncertain if that is feasible.
- The panels will be covered with anti-reflective coating to prevent glare.
- They have no control of property taxes and don't know how property taxes may be affected by the project.
- They are contracting with Consumers Energy and there is no method for providing power locally.
- In response to the concern about the 15 years after the contract with Consumers Energy expires, the project will still have useful life and there are other options to continue the project for the balance of the project.

- They had no affiliation with the removal of the trees along Herman Road. They will consider a vegetative screen there. They plan to keep as many of the existing trees as they can.
- There is no radiation produces by their project.
- AES is a public company so anyone can buy their stock. They are based in the U.S. and their goal is to grow within the U.S.
- They are willing to provide other benefits to offset any impacts on the community and are open to suggestions.
- The property value study cited is from the east coast and does not apply to Michigan. They have other studies from more similar areas they are willing to share that show little impact on property values.

STATEMENT BY PLANNING CONSULTANT

John Enos recommends the applicant respond to the comments in writing and would like to see changes to the plan based on those comments. He recommends that the planning commission not make a decision until we are able to receive and review any proposed changes to the plan. The earliest that the planning commission would make a decision would be at the June 2, 2022 planning commission meeting.

E. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Thompson with a second by Brooks to adjourn the meeting. **Motion Carried.** Adjourned at 8:52 PM.

Submitted by Sybil Kolon, May 20, 2022

Minutes Approved:

Ashley Burt  
Secretary

6/2/2022

Date