



12956 24th Avenue SW, Pillager, MN 56473

phone: (218) 746-3652 / fax: (218) 746-3612 / e-mail: info@sylvantwp.com

Public Hearing Minutes – Sunup Solar Farm ***Thursday August 22nd, 2024***

Call to Order/Pledge of Allegiance/Roll Call: Vice-Chair Bennett called the Public Hearing Meeting to order at 6:00 pm and the Pledge of Allegiance was said. Those present at the meeting were Supervisors Arlene Schmit, Keith Card, Greg Bennett, Bob Johnson, and Clerk Jenna Ruggles. Residents present included Greg Booth, Vickie Kettlewell, David Winkelman, Kim Meyer, Dave Johnson, Jacki & Tom Kientzle.

Purpose of Hearing is to discuss and take comments on the application for Sunup Solar Farm located off of 125th Street SW to have a Conditional Use Permit (CUP).

Supervisor Bennett read the Public Notice and Clerk Ruggles entered it into the record of proceeding. Supervisor Bennett announced that the Affidavit of Publication was in the Brainerd Dispatch on August 3rd, 2024 and Clerk Ruggles entered it into the record.

Presentation of Application: Vickie Kettlewell explained why they are looking into the Solar Farm and Agricultural combination project known as ‘Agrivoltaics’. This farm would have some elevated panels to allow for growing crops and cattle grazing under them. She indicated that their goal is to not disturb the soil in the area and to keep farm business the same with growing crops and cattle. She explained that this will be a demonstration project, working with groups like Crow Wing River Basin Forage Council and Sustainable Farming Association which will then have educational tours or pasture walks.

David Winkelman followed up with additional information such as the project is only going to be 10-acres, and the cost will be roughly \$3.7 million. He included that this project would create jobs for the local economy for the installation of the farm as well as ongoing maintenance jobs. Minnesota Power will be purchasing the energy from this farm and distributing it locally. This farm will be located 265’ from the roadway. He also explained that some benefits to solar not only include renewable energy but also help reduce pollution and other resources such as coal and will help keep the forests.

Public Input:

- Kim Meyer indicated that he was in favor of the solar farm and that he was here to get more information on it. During discussions he indicated that he would like to see a buffer added to the plan on 125th Street, he thought that the current tree line between his parcel and this one was probably sufficient as a buffer for that side.
- Dave Johnson was representing himself and the Planning Commission, he reminded the Board that he was not opposed to the project and that he likes the idea of solar.



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He asked the Board to keep in mind that what they decide does set a precedent in the Township, and that the first solar farm was required to add a berm to be a buffer between the road and panels. He reminded the Board that the Comprehensive Plan and vision of the Board and Planning Commission was to protect green space. He feels that buffers in residential areas are important to keeping that green space feel for the Township. He also mentioned that if the Board felt a berm was too much for this project that maybe they would consider screening by using 6' trees at the fence line.

- Jacki Kientzle came to hear more about the plans and said she is a big fan of solar and was more excited when she heard about how the cattle and crops were going to be mixed into the project. She feels that a buffer is important as well and that trees would be a nicer view and help more than a berm.
- Tom Kintzle was also here to hear more about the project and was in favor of the project and would also like to see a buffer. He also asked to see a map of the area where the panels would be placed.

After everyone had a chance to speak, there was a group discussion which included why the Board would ask for a buffer and what could go there if this solar farm was not being proposed without the requirement of a buffer. There was a question on where MN Power would be hooking up to the grid and to date that is undecided by MN Power.

Vice Chair Bennett closed the public input portion of the meeting and asked the Board to consider the testimonies and comments that were presented. Discussion from the Board included topics of the trees, size, type, distance of planting, and such. It was mentioned that maybe the Township has been putting too many stipulations on our local businesses. It was also mentioned that seeing the cattle would also be nice because that is part of the agricultural green space feeling. It was mentioned that the berm that MN Power put at their solar park was not sufficient to be a screening buffer. But the Board would like to see a screening buffer because solar panels are ugly, and trees would probably be the best option for this solar farm.

Supervisor Schmit moved to approve Sunup Solar Farm's application for a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) with the condition that they plant 6' trees, seconded by Supervisor Card and the motion was amended to indicate that there should be 2 rows of trees spaced alternating at 10' apart on the south side at the fence line. Supervisor Johnson recommended to amend the motion to approve the Sunup Solar Farm's application for a Conditional Use Permit with the condition that they provide a visual screening buffer on 125th Street of their choice, this was seconded by Supervisor Schmit and the



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motion passed unanimously. The first motion which had an amendment to it was called, and that motion passed with the amendments in the recommended amended motion. The decision and conditions for this Public Hearing was that the application for a CUP for the solar farm was approved with the condition that they provide a screening buffer on 125th Street SW.

Adjournment: Supervisor Schmit **moved to adjourn**, seconded by Supervisor Card and the motion carried with the meeting adjourning at 7:07 pm.

Minutes submitted by,

Jenna Ruggles, Clerk

Greg Booth, Chair

These minutes were approved as presented on September 5, 2024 by Supervisor Schmit, seconded by Supervisor Card and the motion carried with Supervisors Bennett, Card, Schmit, and Johnson. Chair Booth abstained from the motion.

Date: 09.05.2024