

Keene Township Planning Commission

Minutes from Public Hearing for Special Use Application (Simpson Farms' Solar) and Routine Planning Commission Meeting – Wednesday, August 7th, 2024

Denny Briggs called the meeting to order at 7:01pm with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Roll call:

Present: Denny Briggs, Christine Hendrick, Ray Krieger, Matt Stahlin, Corey Wojcik, Cori Wilber

Absent: Nancy ~~Seleman~~Solomon

There were approximately 15 members of the community present along with Zoning Administrator Jeanne Vandersloot and a representative from Mid-America Solar.

Changes to the agenda:

Briggs requested that the agenda be modified to put New Business ahead of Old Business, and that we discuss adding additional Planning Commission meeting dates to work on the solar ordinance. Wojcik made a motion to approve agenda amendments; Hendrick seconded. All in favor. Motion carried.

Approval of last meeting minutes:

Wojcik motioned to approve meeting minutes from last meeting. Hendrick seconded. All approved. Motion carried.

Report from Township Board Rep:

Per Wojcik, nothing significant to report.

Report from Zoning Administrator:

Vandersloot stated she did not have the Zoning Administrator report with her.

Public Comment – Topics not on the agenda:

None

Public Hearing for Special Use Application:

Notes: The Planning Commission was provided a copy of the Special Use Application approximately two weeks prior to this meeting, to allow time for review. The proposed project consists of 118 ground mounted panels along the south side of an existing barn at 2096 Hawley Hwy, for onsite consumption. The application and engineered drawings are included at the end of this document.

A representative from Mid-America Solar provided a verbal overview of the project. The landowner,

Robert Simpson, was also in attendance.

Public comment: A handful of questions were posed by community members and answered by contractor and landowner.

Hendrick noted that the location of the proposed project meets all setbacks and that the location is not anywhere near any dwellings. Additionally, Simpson Farms owns almost all surrounding properties. A letter from the closest adjacent property owner (Stephen Grody) had been submitted and was read aloud by Briggs. Grody is in favor of the project.

Wilber made a motion to recommend approval of the Special Use Application to the Township Board. Wojcik seconded. All approved. Motion carried.

New Business:

- Discussed adding two Special Meetings for the Planning Commission to work on the solar ordinance. Intent is to have an ordinance drafted in time to hold a public hearing at the regular Oct 1st Planning Commission meeting. Dates of Special Meetings = Wednesday, August 21st and Monday, September 9th. Wojcik made a motion to approve, Wilber seconded. Motion carried.
- Resident & Statistician Tom Sprague provided a high-level overview of what additional things he could analyze in respect to the Renewable Energy Survey results. To do so, he needs some additional information. Twp Supervisor Bob Schafer will assist with obtaining that. Mr. Sprague will plan to attend the August 21st PC meeting and provide an approximate 15-minute presentation.
- Briggs explained that he and Schafer consulted with the Township's attorney at Foster & Swift about assistance with writing the Keene Twp solar ordinance. The attorney provided a template ordinance that they had drafted for another township.
 - Utilizing the template would be the most cost-effective way to proceed if we want their assistance writing an ordinance.
 - The template is written in a way that if it is approved by the Board, it could accomplish three things: 1. rescind the 2018 ordinance, 2. activate the new ordinance, and 3. if/when PA233 goes into effect, all changes necessary to the township's ordinance are clearly defined in the bottom section and will automatically be adopted.
 - Briggs asked for the PC and the public's opinions on the format of the template. He opened the floor up for 5 minutes for public comment. No concerns noted from the public. Krieger would like to proceed with two separate ordinances – one compliant and one non-compliant.
 - Wilber would like clarification on whether energy companies can entirely bypass the township, or if the MPSC will refer them back to the township if we have a compliant ordinance. She's concerned that this is a gray area. She will send the question to Schafer to forward to the township's attorney.
 - Vote to proceed with attorney-drafted ordinance: Wilber – yes, Hendrick – yes, Briggs – yes, Wojcik – yes, Krieger – no, Stahlin – yes. Proceeding.

Old Business:

- Spent 15 minutes working on simple adjustments to solar ordinance. PC members to review the new document prior to the August 21st meeting and return with comments and suggested numbers to plug into the template for setbacks, etc. Will work on those parts first on August 21st.
- Briggs asked Vandersloot to take the ~~entire~~-Foster Swift ordinance template (~~not just the commercial-section~~) and substitute Keene Township's zoning district names in place of the zoning district names that are currently in the template.

Public Comment – Any Topic:

- None

Adjournment:

Wojcik made a motion to adjourn. Stahlin seconded. All approved. The meeting adjourned at 8:37 pm.

Minutes recorded by Cori Wilber