

City of Winsted
Planning Commission
City Council Chambers
February 8, 2016
6:00 p.m.

Present: Jolynn Cafferty
Marvin Ebensperger
Mike Guggemos
Michael Henrich
Allison Moses
Tom Ollig – City Council Liason

Staff Present: Daniel Tienter, City Administrator
Raquel Kirchoff, Deputy City Clerk

1) Call the Meeting to Order

Mr. Ebensperger called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

2) Approval of Minutes

Ms. Cafferty motioned to approve the minutes from the Planning Commission Meeting on January 11, 2016. Mr. Henrich seconded the motion. Motion carried 5-0.

3) No Public Hearings

4) No Old Business

5) New Business

a) Zoning Ordinance Amendments – Solar Energy Systems

Mr. John Anderson, Municipal Development Group, stated that the City received a request to amend the Zoning Ordinance regarding Solar Energy Systems. Minnesota Solar, LLC has requested the text amendment in order to facilitate a solar garden on land within the city zoned I-1 Industrial. Mr. Anderson stated that a public hearing regarding this text amendment is being considered for March 14, 2016.

Mr. Anderson reviewed the text amendment that he drafted which was provided in the Planning Commission packet materials for the meeting.

After Mr. Anderson reviewed the information provided in his memo, Mr. Guggemos requested further information regarding the taxes that the City would receive from a business on industrial land versus taxes to the City from a solar garden. Mr. Tienter stated that he would request this information from the City's Financial Consultant for a future meeting.

Mr. Tienter requested that Solar Energy Systems in an Airport District be changed from Accessory Use to Interim Use. This will provide the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MNDOT) and the Federal Aviation Association (FAA) with the opportunity to review solar panels that are adjacent to the airport.

Mr. Guggemos asked if the City could choose whether or not to allow a solar garden to be placed on a property, to save the property for a business development in the Industrial Zoned land within the city. Mr. Anderson stated no; that if a request was received and the applicant met all of the required conditions, the property owners would be granted permission to lease/use their property for a solar garden. Mr. Anderson continued by stating that language regarding density of the areas that gardens are located has been drafted, and that this language can limit the number of solar energy systems in an area.

Mr. Guggemos asked Mr. Gerardo Ruiz, Minnesota Solar, LLC, why Winsted was being considered for a solar energy system. Mr. Ruiz stated that a landowner was willing to lease his land for this type of system and because of Winsted's proximity to a substation. He continued by stating that there could be a benefit for the City to subscribe to the solar garden for electricity and lock a price for electric rates, that are the same or lower than Xcel Energy rates and that will not fluctuate.

Mr. Guggemos asked Mr. Anderson if language regarding screening of the solar garden was included in the draft language. Mr. Anderson stated no, but language could be added regarding screening.

Mr. Henrich asked if the City would have access to the system in an emergency situation if a shutdown of the system was required. Mr. Ruiz stated that the system is monitored remotely and can be shut down remotely from two different sites, with Xcel Energy having very strict safety requirements.

Mr. Guggemos stated that he was not sure that the Planning Commission should hold a public hearing in March, 2016 because there were items of information that needed to be gathered and brought back for further consideration. Mr. Anderson stated that he could make the changes to the language that the Planning Commission members discussed in time for a public hearing in March. Mr. Tienter stated that the items that the Planning Commission requested more information on could be brought to the next meeting. Mr. Tienter continued by stating that the Planning Commission does not have to act on the text amendment at the hearing. The Planning Commission could hold the public hearing in March, and could still discuss changes to the language at that hearing or not recommend approval of the text amendment.

Mr. Ebensperger asked if language should be developed requiring a security fence surrounding the solar energy systems. Mr. Anderson stated that language could be developed, and that with an Interim Use Permit, the City will be able to add specific requirements at that time also. The Planning Commission asked Mr. Ruiz for the specific language required by Minnesota Solar, LLC regarding fencing around a solar energy system. Mr. Ruiz stated that the fencing required was a chain link fence, approximately six (6) to seven (7) feet to protect the assets of the unmanned solar energy systems.

Mr. Anderson reviewed the following items that were discussed regarding the solar energy system text amendment.

- Research the tax revenue of an industrial structure compared to a solar garden.
- Adjust the Airport District from Accessory Permitted to Interim Use Permitted
- Research solar sky space easements and how they are granted for informational purposes.
- Removing some of the solar farm language in Section 10, Purpose and Intent and Applicability.
- Screening Provision – Mr. Anderson will draft proposed language regarding visual relief from the equipment with flexibility to work with each situation depending on what natural resources exist for screening on each separate proposed property. Consider requiring a screening plan with each application that must be approved.
- Consider setbacks for a solar energy system. Should they be the same as the principal use?
- Fencing requirements around the solar energy system – Mr. Anderson will propose language similar to chain link fence requirements of Minnesota Solar, LLC.
- Research the impervious coverage limit in the City versus the Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
- Consider whether the density requirement of eight (8) solar energy systems per section (one mile) is the appropriate number. Further investigate what other cities have for language regarding this. Mr. Ruiz stated that he has seen requirements of a minimum distance of, for example, one-half mile between solar gardens, rather than a certain number of gardens within a section of land.
- Research any authorities or powers the City may have to limit or regulate the sale of the land for competing purposes or interests of the land.

6) No Other

7) Adjourn

Mr. Guggemos motioned to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Moses seconded the motion. Motion carried 5-0. Meeting adjourned at 7:33 p.m.

Daniel Tienter

Daniel Tienter
City Administrator
City of Winsted

ATTEST:

Raquel Kirchoff

Raquel Kirchoff,
Deputy City Clerk
City of Winsted