

City of Columbus
Regular Planning Commission Meeting
April 1, 2015

The April 1, 2015 regular meeting of the Planning Commission for the City of Columbus was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Chair Garth Sternberg at the City Hall. Present were Commission members Jim Watson, Pam Wolowski, Jesse Preiner, and Jody Krebs; City Administrator Elizabeth Mursko, Planner Dean Johnson, and Recording Secretary Karen Boland.

Also in attendance were City Council members Bill Krebs and Denny Peterson; Gordy Simanton of Solar Stone, Orville Sachs, Jeannine Sachs, John Waldoch, Jeff Joyer, Nick Waldoch, Sue and Steve Wagamon, Perry Wagamon, Frank Wagamon, Jon Peterson, Sherri Nase, Karl Gronquist, Mary Preiner, and Pat Preiner.

AGENDA APPROVAL

Motion by Krebs to approve the Agenda as presented. Second by Preiner. Motion carried.

APPROVAL - REGULAR PC MEETING MINUTES OF MARCH 4, 2015

Motion by Wolowski to approve the minutes of the March 4, 2015 regular Planning Commission meeting as written. Second by Krebs. Motion carried.

PUBLIC HEARING – 9218 LAKE DRIVE IUP APPLICATION (PC-15-102)

At this time a public hearing was held to receive testimony regarding an IUP application request for 9218 Lake Drive, Columbus, MN. The applicant is Jonathan Peterson. The property owner is The Barn LLC (Peterson Companies, Inc.). Separate minutes are prepared.

9218 LAKE DRIVE IUP APPLICATION DISCUSSION

Krebs asked the Planner about Finding of Fact #9, which states the property will be used only by Peterson employees for access to salt storage for use in the snow removal business. She feels vendors should be mentioned as well. Johnson said this is clarified in the permits, but language can be added excepting third party vendors delivering salt and sand. His intent was to make it clear that this is not a retail operation selling salt/sand to anybody wanting it during a snowstorm.

Johnson clarified #2 in the Recommendations. This is put in every permit if the County has authority over the access road. Lake Drive is the County's jurisdiction.

Krebs pointed out a typographical error in Recommendation #9. The word "be" should be omitted.

Motion by Sternberg to forward to the City Council the IUP application for building a bulk storage bunker at 9218 Lake Drive, with a recommendation for approval based on the findings of fact and recommendations from the Planner's memo dated March 24, 2015, with an addition to Finding #9, and a correction to Recommendation #9, as noted below. Second by Watson. Motion carried.

Findings of Fact

- 1) Peterson Companies, Inc. (“Peterson”) submitted an IUP application on January 14, 2015 to construct and operate salt/sand storage buildings at 9218 Lake Drive (“Property”). The application was found incomplete.
- 2) An updated IUP application, received by the City on February 13, 2015, was found complete.
- 3) The 60-day review period ends on April 14, 2015. The 120-day review period, if necessary, ends on June 13, 2015.
- 4) Peterson erected temporary structures on the Property for salt and sand storage for its snow plowing business.
- 5) On December 10, 2014 the City Council authorized issuance of a building permit for the erected structures, subject to application for an IUP.
- 6) Peterson constructed two contiguous concrete walled, wood and metal framed structures, which are approximately 80 feet long and a combined width of approximately 45 feet.
- 7) The roofs are approximately 24 feet in height and are covered with ‘greenhouse plastic.’
- 8) Peterson has requested a one-year permit.
- 9) The Property will be used only by Peterson employees for access to salt/sand storage for use in its snow removal business; **excepting third party vendors delivering salt and/or sand.**
- 10) Truck traffic during an average snow event (less than 10 inches) is estimated at approximately eight trucks per day.
- 11) Peak truck usage for major snow events (greater than 10 inches) is estimated at approximately ten trucks per day.
- 12) A front end loader and skid steer loader will be left on the Property during the snow season.
- 13) Except for year round site maintenance, delivery of salt and sand in the snow season, and the loading of dump trucks with salt/sand mix during snow events, no other use of the Property is proposed.
- 14) Access to the Property is provided via the existing gated access on Lake Drive.
- 15) There will be no fuels stored or dispensed on the Property and no hazardous materials will be used or stored on the Property.
- 16) The Planning Commission held a public hearing on April 1, 2015 to consider the proposed Peterson IUP.

Recommendations

Based upon the above findings of fact, the Planning Commission recommends to the City Council approval of the Peterson Salt/Sand Storage Buildings IUP, with the following conditions.

- 1) Approval of the IUP is conditioned upon issuance of a building permit for the salt/sand storage buildings and subsequent occupancy permit.
- 2) Access to the Property is subject to jurisdiction by Anoka County.

- 3) Use of the Property is limited to year round site and building maintenance, year round communication tower access and maintenance, seasonal vendor unloading of bulk salt and sand, storage and blending of salt and sand, and seasonal load out of salt/sand during snow events.
- 4) Use of the Property for salt/sand blending, storage and load out during the snow season is limited to Peterson employees and vehicles.
- 5) Equipment storage on the Property shall be limited to a front end loader and skid steer loader during the snow season and during deliveries and processing of salt and sand.
- 6) There shall be no fuels or hazardous materials stored on the Property.
- 7) The term of the IUP shall be valid from the date of City Council approval until May 31, 2016.
- 8) The salt/sand storage buildings shall be removed from the Property and the Property shall be restored to a pre-salt/sand storage buildings condition within 30 days of the expiration of the IUP.
- 9) Peterson shall ~~be~~ reimburse the City for its out of pocket expenses incurred in the review and approval of the IUP, including any subsequent inspection and enforcement actions.

This matter will go before the City Council at their next meeting, which will be held Wednesday, April 8th at 7 p.m.

PRESENTATION: SOLAR STONE PARTNERS

Gordy Simanton, with Solar Stone, gave a Power Point presentation on the Shared Community Solar program. Solar Stone is headquartered in Minneapolis. They have 25 years of domestic and international renewable energy development experience. They currently control 2000 acres for solar development in Minnesota.

In 2013 the MN State Legislature passed legislation creating a Community Solar program to increase the production of clean energy. By 2020 Xcel Energy is required to dedicate a minimum of 1.5% to solar energy production.

Solar gardens are used to distribute power from solar panels directly into Xcel grids. These gardens may generate a maximum of 1 Megawatt per garden. Approximately 5 acres of land with dedicated solar panels equals 1 Megawatt. There must be a minimum of 5 subscribers per garden, and none may use more than 40% of the capacity. To subscribe to a solar garden, it does not need to be within the municipality. The subscriber must be physically located in the same county as the garden or in an adjacent county. For instance, Columbus could be eligible to subscribe to any garden in Anoka County or an adjacent county.

The customer subscribers sign a 25-year contract with Solar Stone. They buy a block of energy. They are billed by their regular electrical energy distributor (Xcel) and issued bill credits from Xcel. Solar Stone estimates a 5-10% savings in energy bills for subscribers. There are no capital or operating expenses.

If an entity is interested in subscribing, the first step is for Solar Stone to review and evaluate the past 12 months of energy consumption. They then submit a savings analysis. The subscriber agreement would then be reviewed by legal and financial staff. Once a subscription is signed, Solar Stone submits that application to Xcel for approval.

To host a solar garden, there is no capital investment. It is a way to generate new revenue streams. It can optimize unproductive land and earn lease income. One community is repurposing a capped landfill.

There were questions about host site locations. Simanton said they are looking for agricultural property. In some cities they have decommissioned wastewater treatment ponds and repurposed those. Right now, Solar Stone is currently working with 18 potential solar garden host sites in Anoka County.

If a private land owner leased land as a solar garden site, there would be no tax benefit to the City. If City land is used, they would be eligible for solar production tax benefits.

There was discussion about the possible use of designated wetlands as host sites. It would depend on the nature of the land, the watershed district, etc. Simanton said the rule says that as long as soil is undisturbed, a facility could be placed in a wetland. Solar Stone would of course have to review the land from an engineering standpoint. But, the panels use helical screws on sleds for the panels, so they are not replacing the soil.

Solar Stone is totally independent. They receive no federal subsidies.

Mursko asked how Columbus would opt into the Shared Community Solar program. Simanton said the City could apply to Solar Stone to subscribe to any solar garden in Anoka County or an adjacent county. It would include power to anything the City currently pays bills for through Xcel. Mursko explained that some City power is billed by Connexus and some is billed by Xcel. Solar Stone would only be able to work with Xcel.

Planner Johnson said five other communities he works with have issued permits for solar gardens. Permits have to be issued for 25 years. There has been no resolution of the wetland issue, as far as he knows.

Simanton explained that solar farms are 50-100 Megawatt programs. Those are directly with the Public Utility Commission and Xcel. The solar garden program is not the same thing and is on a much smaller scale. This is totally different than what is being discussed in Wyoming.

Johnson said that if a solar garden were to go forward in Columbus, the ordinance would have to be amended in a couple of areas; definitions would need to be added and a decision would be needed about what districts would be appropriate as host sites.

DISCUSSION – WALDOCH FARM NON-BINDING CONCEPT REVIEW

Nick and John Waldoch, and Jeff Joyer presented a non-binding concept review to the PC, exploring the possibility of extending the commercial zoned area to the back of their farm – back

to Zodiac Street. Currently, the land along Lake Drive is zoned commercial, but the back is zoned residential. The reason for their request is to make the property more salable as a commercial property. There is no specific proposal being made by a buyer, but they would like the option of offering the land for sale as one piece.

Johnson said this action would require a Comprehensive Plan amendment and a zoning change. Any future use of the property, if the zoning is changed, would have to fall within uses within that zoning district. The PC would first need to receive a formal application, and hold a public hearing. If they approve a zoning text amendment and Comp plan amendment, it would go to the City Council for approval. If the Council approves, a request would need to be made to the Met Council for a Comp plan amendment. The Met Council has a 90-120 day review process.

Sternberg said that Lake Drive is the City's C/I district, and this property is prime for rezoning. Wolowski commented that the change would not deviate from the current dynamics of the area. Krebs believes rezoning would make commercial interest more viable. PC members believe the concept warrants an application. The PC's opinion will be passed along to the City Council. The CC will look at the non-binding concept at their April 8th meeting.

DISCUSSION – PRIVATE ROADS & AMBIENT LIGHTING

Private Roads

Johnson does not support allowing private roads unless it is in a large residential development with a substantial homeowner's association that won't default. He has not seen successful maintenance agreements without money being put into a fund.

Mursko said the City allows two houses off an unimproved roadway. There was discussion about existing private roads and some of the access and expansion issues surrounding them. Problems have also arisen when two houses share an unimproved roadway and a third lot is possible, but no one wants to bear the cost of developing the road.

Johnson said some communities go so far as to make their policy: "We aren't going to allow you to minimize the maximum use of your property." It is a policy decision. How much do you want to try to control what decisions people make with their property?

There was discussion about policies in place for a property owner to petition for blacktopping, and the City's responsibility for providing public services to its citizens, including guaranteeing public safety access.

The PC unanimously recommends to the CC that the City not allow private residential roads.

Ambient Lighting

Sternberg handed out a packet to PC members for review before the next meeting. It includes samples of ordinances used in other cities, a MN model ordinance, some guidelines for lighting regulations for small communities, and examples of good and bad lighting fixtures.

The PC does not see a need for regulation of lighting in residential districts. Mursko said the City has never received a complaint about residential lighting.

Sternberg will put together a rough draft of a simple ordinance to minimize ambient lighting issues. He asked PC members to look at the materials and bring questions and suggestions to the next meeting.

PUBLIC OPEN FORUM

There was no topic raised for discussion for Open Forum.

CITY ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT

Mursko reported that the PC meeting on April 15 will be joint with the CC. Met Council sector representative Ryan Garcia, and district representative Sandy Rummel will be attending. Mursko gave the PC some Met Council reading material. The representatives are aware that PC and CC members would like to discuss density, and the bridge/interchange project.

There will be applications at both May PC meetings. One is for a plat off of Lexington, for three new lots. The other is from RAHP for additional recreational activities, and requesting larger directional signage.

PLANNING COMMISSION MEMBERS' REPORT

WOLOWSKI COMMENT:

Wolowski commented that she sent letters re: the bridge project to the Met Council and received a response from district representative, Sandy Rummel.

PREINER COMMENT:

Preiner asked if there has been any progress on the bridge project. Mursko said there has been no movement. Council member Krebs and the bridge task force group will schedule a day at the Capitol to meet with key legislators. Mursko said there is a lot of competition among projects. Anoka County officials had good meetings in Washington D.C., but no funding was obtained. The City and County need to establish a plan in case the full funding does not materialize.

ATTENDANCE - NEXT CC MEETING

Krebs is scheduled to attend the City Council meeting on April 8, 2015.

Motion by Krebs to adjourn. Second by Watson. Motion carried.
Meeting adjourned at 9:40 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted:

Karen Boland, Recording Secretary