

**Watertown Township Planning Commission**  
**Approved Meeting Minutes**  
**Thursday, August 19, 2021**  
**6:00 PM Special Meeting**

**1. CALL TO ORDER / PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.** Chairperson Mark Batkie called the meeting to order and led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance at 6:00 p.m.

ROLL CALL: All members present: Mark Batkie, Nathan Campbell, William Dixon, Gary Fetting, Jim Hacker, Jason Radloff and Al Stoutenburg

ABSENT: None

ADMINISTRATION: Zoning Administrator-Scott Franzel

GUESTS: Ken Landsburg, John Arnold, Scott Campbell, Nancy Campbell, Bill Parrish, Jim Stolicker, Rick Pangburn, Lee Rich, Raymie Ellis, Mike Smith, Adam Flori (sp.) and et.al. too many to list.

**2. AGENDA APPROVAL: ADDITIONS / CORRECTIONS**

a) Motion by:\_GF\_ Support by:\_NC\_

VOTE: **Passed unanimously**

**3. CONSIDERATION AND APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES: (amended)**

a) Motion by:\_JR\_ Support by:\_JH\_

VOTE: **Passed unanimously**

**4. PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

a) Mike Smith: Thanked the Commission for the work that they do. Read a prepared statement opposing solar development. (Attachment 1)

b) Rick Pangburn: Thanked the Commission for the fair and sensible setback boundary of 500'. "I don't envy you, yours is a thankless job No matter what you decide, our township will never be the same, even after this is over." He then voiced concern about the lack of guarantee for the following: heat, noise, magnetic impulses, property devaluation. He then questioned the developer provided report materials. "What happens if the studies are wrong?" He then went on to describe his own recent out of pocket expense for a survey after discovering that previously set markers could not be located. Lastly, he concluded his comments with a caution about the risk of leaving a large clean for our future generations.

c) Ray Welker: Thanked the Commission for their dedication, thanked the citizens for their help. (Dixon asked Welker to direct his comments to the board chair) He then concurred with Pangburn and offered his support on each of the previous points.

d) Ida Izworski: Stated that she was a long-term resident and didn't want to see our property values destroyed. They must be put in a place that's much less fertile. She spoke of the beauty of both the Aldrich and Landsburg crop farms. What will be done with the waste? Will this increase our electric bills? I don't want to see it and husband Richard has the same thoughts.

e) Richard Izworski: Stated that he had the same sentiments as his wife. Stated that he has no problem with someone trying to make money, but what do you do when it goes belly up?

f) Adam Flori: (sp.) Identified himself as an attorney representing Ken Landsburg. Echoed previous citizen thankless job comments with respect to the Commission. Flori (sp.) then went on to allege that commission member Stoutenburg had a conflict of interest and should not be a part of the voting, discussion or deliberation process for the current solar ordinance. He then took exception to a recent board of trustees approved third six month moratorium. He asked the commission for reasonable regulations. Lastly, he requested that the moratorium be ended.

g) Scott Bradley: Stated that he wanted to make sure that the use permit for a neighboring dog kennel on Townline Rd. not be extended at the sale.

## 5. CORRESPONDENCE

a. None reported

## 6. NEW BUSINESS:

a. Virginia & Chris Moore: Kennel License 951 S. Townline Rd

Chris Moore identified himself as a person who flew in from Texas today, who is interested in purchasing the aforementioned property for a dog kennel. Stated the he served his country for 16 years. He acknowledged the current noise problem at the property and stated that he would do better. Dixon then stated that the township could not offer such assurances, because of the procedures required for special land use and home occupancy approval.

b. Solar Ordinance Language Debates Decisions

Setbacks: (Much debate and discussion with no resolution of the 300' vs. 500' non-participating landowner setback regulation. The discourse was marred many times by more than one person speaking at a time.) -move to end of setback discussion section.

Batkie opened with an opposition to the 500' setback in favor of 300'. Fetting concurred citing several sources including; the University of Michigan, Michigan State University, Iowa State University and many others.

Radloff stated that his number was 500'.

Batkie questioned Radloff's rationale for moving to 500'.

Radloff to Batkie "Were you at the last meeting? I added 200' after I toured a solar project and that's all we talked about for two hours. I want it recorded that our neighboring township of Elmer is 1500' and Moore is 1000' from nonparticipating parcels. Radloff then questioned Batkie's source material for his position of 300'.

Batkie responded with a close echo of Fetting sources.

Hacker stated, To be technical, last time we started at extremes and in between the highs and lows, we ended up with 400' or 500'.

Fetting stated that he was not a big fan of averaging. I've tried to look at the facts, trying to establish the rationalization for 500' over 300', but I honestly have been unable to do that. I attempted to reach out to the local anti-solar group, "watertowncitizens@yahoo.com" to discover how they arrived at their 500' setback requirement as displayed on their signs. Unfortunately, their email address, which is on all their signs and billboards, is not a valid address.

Radloff then mentioned the problem of construction noise that could potentially go on for years.

Fetting said that could be addressed with the site plan review and would not be around the clock.

Batkie feels that the noise or the panels are not terribly distracting and generally accepted standard exist for construction. Batkie stated that studies done at many colleges discourage excessive setbacks.

Stoutenburg stated that he was at 500' to preserve the rural character referenced in the township master plan. That way you could still farm and not see them.

Fetting, To be fair the solar has been a permitted use since the original ordinance was adopted in 2011. It was 125' everywhere, but we weren't concerned with large scale solar back then. At the start of writing the new ordinance I took the original setback of 125', doubled it and came up with 250'. Then the work group of Dixon and Stoutenburg suggested 300'.

Radloff stated 500' after educating himself by traveling to the ~~Eaton~~ (another) County project.

Batkie stated that he was in favor of the property rights of the owner. Setbacks exist for the

health, safety and welfare of the residents and not for prohibition. (Much debate and discussion with no resolution of the 300' vs. 500' non-participating landowner setback regulation. The discourse was marred many times by more than one person speaking at a time.) -moved to end of setback discussion section.

Dixon asked the group to move on to a topic where we could all agree. Then listed the topics of application fee, decommissioning instrument and density as possible items.

After some debate the group thought that the fee should be tied to the proposed output and will conduct peer review of other municipal charges and report back at the next meeting. It was suggested that \$1,000 per megawatt might be a good starting point to make certain that the developer would incur all of the costs associated with any potential project. More analysis is needed. Will ask Township Attorney for input as well.

Stoutenburg asked if density was changed to 5% and Fetting stated that no consensus was reached so it was unchanged at 8%.

Dixon suggested the addition of a renewable energy district. A remote area, with few neighbors that is currently not being used for agricultural production. So far the debate has been a choice between corn and solar panels. What if we could have both? Let's designate a preferred area of placement with relaxed regulation that will incentivize this zone. Right now the old state owned peat moss strip mine is a flooded mosquito swamp that pays zero taxes. Dixon went on to say that he was not in favor of exclusive placement in the renewable energy district, rather that regulations could be limited in such an area. Dixon also questioned removal of the property tax cap on developed property. Right now there is a situation where the appraised value and the taxable value are hundreds of thousands of dollars apart. The removal of the cap could produce a long term advantage in tax collection that would be permanent as opposed to only collecting the depreciating value of personal property tax on a ten or thirty year schedule. Will contact Assessor Jeannie Diaz for information.

Stoutenburg inquired about the exact financial instrument that will be used for decommissioning.

Fetting stated that input was needed from an attorney or financial adviser to make such a determination.

Stoutenburg asked about the mapping requirement for field tile and the requirement of achieving a depth of 5' under any ditch. Fetting stated that the drain commission will determine the standards for depth under ditches and drains and related setbacks.

#### 7. PUBLIC COMMENTS:

- a) Rick Pangburn; Can't believe that you guys are waffling on your decision of 500'. Question Are set backs figured from my property line to the fence or solar panel? Answer: Fence as currently written.
- b)
- c)
- d)

#### 8. ADJOURNMENT:

a) Motion by:\_BD\_ Support by:\_JH\_

VOTE: Passed unanimously  
Time:\_7:35pm

Future Meeting  
6:00pm Thursdays  
September 16, 2021

Respectfully submitted  
William Dixon, Planning Commission Secretary

## Solar Industrial Complex and the Master Plan

Samsung, one of the largest industrial producers in the world, is trying to develop an industrial solar complex in Watertown Township. It has been referred to as a "solar farm." I personally find the term "solar farm" misleading. The proposed site is a massive industrial complex spread over 1,300 acres, which is only phase one of three phases. The term "farm" usually indicates the growth of an agricultural product or animal product. Industrial solar complexes do not "grow" anything, but decrease the ability to grow product.

Watertown Township has a Master Plan for the development of the township. The dominant theme in the Master Plan is to always protect the "rural character." Was the term "solar farm" created to fit the terminology of the Master Plan verbiage of "rural character?" I don't know the answer to that question, but I do know we have some very wonderful people on our township board and planning commission.

### According to the Watertown Township 2017 Master Plan and Recreation Plan:

#### Residential Development Goals page 28

"...preserves the overall **rural character** of the Township and its farmland resources..."

#### Commercial and Industrial Development Goals page 31

"Provide opportunities for **limited expansion** of commercial and industrial uses that **minimize negative impacts** upon adjacent land uses, respond to the predominant **rural character** of the community..."

#### Agricultural Land Use page 37

"Agricultural is the largest land use category in Watertown Township and the Township sees that continuing for many years to come. This land use is categorized by **large open spaces and viewsheds of agricultural crops**. Homes are scattered across this area in large lots. **Farming operations take priority** in this area and roads are developed and maintained to handle large farm equipment."

#### Potential Future Land Use page 38

Agriculture 20,069 acres 89.5%

Residential 1,542 acres 6.9%

Commercial/Industrial 639 acres 2.8%

Total 22,429 acres 100%

It seems to us, a 1,300-acre industrial solar complex is in opposition to the Watertown Township 2017 Master Plan and Recreation Plan. Watertown Township is not the place for this project. As of August 3<sup>rd</sup>, my wife Karen Smith has knocked on the doors of over 325 homes in Watertown Township talking with the residence and only five people were in favor of this industrial solar complex being built.

Sincerely,

Michael and Karen Smith