

Approved

**Village of Gurnee
Planning and Zoning Board Minutes
April 1, 2020**

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 p.m.

Planning and Zoning Board Members Present: Chairman James Sula, Brian Baugh, Tim Garrity (remote), Edwin Paff, Josh Pejsach (remote), Laura Reilly (remote), and David Nordentoft (remote)

Planning and Zoning Members Absent: none

Other Officials Present: David Ziegler, Community Development Director; Tracy Velkover, Planning Manager (remote); and Bryan Winter, Village Attorney (remote)

Mr. Sula stated that before the meeting started he wanted to say how much he appreciated the IT Department's quick work to allow people to remote into this meeting. With that he read the following statement: In accordance with the Governor's Executive Order in response to COVID-19 #2020-07, in person attendance requirements under the Open Meeting Act have been suspended and relaxed. Therefore, tonight certain members of the Planning & Zoning Board, staff, and the Village Attorney will be participating remotely and that will be reflected in the minutes.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

3. Public Hearing: Village of Gurnee Zoning Map Amendment Petition for property located immediately east of 731 South Route 21

As this is a Public Hearing, Mr. Sula asked that anyone wishing to speak on this matter be sworn-in. Mr. Winter conducted the swearing-in.

Mr. David Ziegler stated that the Village received the subject property last year as a donation. The property was secured in order to accommodate a satellite fire station (Fire Station #3) as its location will provide faster response times to the Heather Ridge area, as well as areas in unincorporated Lake County that are within the Warren Newport Fire Protection District that the part of the Fire Department's responsibility. Mr. Ziegler briefly described the conceptual Fire Station plans and then highlighted the surrounding zoning district and land uses, as well as the Comp Plan designation (and draft Comp Plan designation).

Mr. Sula asked the members of the PZB if they had any questions for Mr. Ziegler. There were no questions, so he opened the floor to the public. As there was no one from the public to comment on the matter or ask questions, he closed the floor.

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Mr. Nordentoft motioned, seconded by Mr. Baugh, to forward a favorable recommendation on the petition of the Village of Gurnee for Zoning Map Amendment to rezone property located immediately east of 731 South Route 21 from O-2, Office Campus District, to P, Public Lands District.

Mr. Sula asked if there was any discussion on the motion. As there was not, a vote was taken.

Roll Call Vote:

Ayes: Baugh, Garrity, Paff, Pejsach, Reilly, Nordentoft, and Sula

Nays: None

Abstain: None

Motion Approved: 7-0-0

4. Public Hearing: Petition of Woodland School District 50 for a Special Use Permit to allow a Ground-Mounted Solar Energy System on property located at 1115 N. Hunt Club Road

Mr. Ziegler stated that Mr. Mitchell Haydenberk is representing Woodland School District 50's petition for a Special Use Permit to allow the installation of a ground-mounted solar energy system on the Intermediate School Property located at 1115 North Hunt Club Road. The subject property is zoned P, Public Lands District, and as such, a ground-mounted solar energy system requires a Special Use Permit.

As this is a Public Hearing, Mr. Sula asked that anyone wishing to speak on this matter be sworn-in.

Mr. Mitchell Haydenber, with Siemens Solar, stated that he is there representing Woodland School District 50 and their request for a SUP to allow the installation of a ground-mounted solar energy system at their Intermediate School (1115 N. Hunt Club Road). He presented plans showing the location of the proposed system; both east and west of the school building in dry basin detention areas. He stated that the electricity generated from these panels would be applied to offset the electrical use at the school.

Mr. Sula asked the members of the PZB if they had any comments or questions for Mr. Haydenberk.

Mr. Paff stated that the right side (east) of the site, where the panels are proposed, is wet sometimes. There are soccer goals in these areas also, so play fields will be taken up by these panels.

Mr. Garrity asked if power generated by these panels in excess of what the Intermediate School uses would be applied to the other school sites.

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Mr. Haydenberk indicated that each school campus will have their own solar panels, and the power generated on this site would off-set electrical needs only for this site.

Mr. Ziegler clarified that the solar panels proposed for the Middle School at Almond and Washington are on a portion of their ballfields that are east of the school. This property is located in unincorporated Lake County, even though the school is in the Village. Therefore, the request for these solar panels will not come before the PZB.

Mr. Pejsach asked about the construction of the structure and whether they are “permanent”.

Mr. Haydenberk indicated that the structures aren’t considered permanent like a building; they can be taken down. However, he noted that they have a 20 year life span. As for their construction, the posts on which the solar panels are mounted are not set in concrete. Instead, they are drilled into the ground (screwed) to a depth of 4 feet. The total mounting height to the top of the panels is approximately 10 to 10.5 feet. He noted that even though the solar panels have a 20 year life span, they can be renewed. Generally, new panels would be mounted on the posts as the efficiency of the panels will have improved significantly over the 20 year time frame (much like a computer).

Ms. Reilly asked if the areas with the solar panels will be fenced.

Mr. Haydenberk indicated that both areas would be fenced with a 6-foot tall no-climb fence, which is a metal fence with smaller spacing than a chain-link fence in order to make climbing more difficult. He noted that they believe that a solid wood fence would be more of a visual distraction and eyesore. Also, a solid fence would provide a place where people can hide.

Mr. Nordentoft stated that he has concerns about the unintended consequences of this request. Specifically his concern is with the eastern array. He asked if any study has been conducted to ensure that at any time (time of day or day of the year) where the solar panels would reflect sun (i.e., be rendered mirrors) into the homes or lots to the south. He noted that there appear, in the winter time, to be some gaps in the tree line on the east side and asked if they would be agreeable to planting additional evergreen trees along the south property line, in any areas if needed.

Mr. Haydenberk stated that the proposed panels are not oriented at a sharp angle, instead they are oriented more horizontally (i.e., close to a 38-degree angle). He noted that a study was conducted to determine this angle and it will not cause any issue for the residential to the south.

Mr. Baugh asked whether reflection would be an issue into the second story windows of the homes.

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Mr. Haydenberk stated that there wouldn't be any reflection to the second story of the homes to the south. He pointed out that in addition to the angle, the panels are setback approximately 85 feet from the residential property line, and the homes on the lots are setback at least 90 feet from that property line. He indicated that if Mr. Baugh was asking if the panels would be seen from the second story windows of homes to the south he noted that it was possible. He also noted that there is a berm south of the panels, so that they actually sit about 3.5 feet down from the adjacent berm/land elevation. He noted that they cannot plant anything lower than the berm area due to water in the area at times.

Mr. Sula asked if any trees are being removed.

Mr. Haydenberk stated that no trees are being removed.

Mr. Sula asked about what happens to excess power generated when the school isn't open.

Mr. Haydenberk stated that the school gets credited for any excess power generated.

Mr. Paff indicated that a pay-off of 20 years doesn't appear to be a good investment.

Mr. Haydenberk indicated that the school has no capital outlay. He stated that Siemens would own and operate the equipment, and maintain the system for 20 years and in exchange provide Woodland with a fixed electrical rate that is significantly below their current rate.

Mr. Sula asked if the panels are fixed.

Mr. Haydenberk indicated that they are fixed; they do not have motors that change the orientation based on sun location.

Mr. Sula then opened the floor to the public.

Mr. Ziegler indicated that the Village received an email from Kristin Bos, a resident of unincorporated Lake County and Woodland parent, regarding this matter. He read the following into the record:

I am writing to you about an agenda item scheduled for the April 1 meeting. I would like to urge you to not approve the solar panels at the Woodland the school.

A question I would ask is has feedback been gathered regarding the solar panels that have been put up at Warren Township high school? What was learned? What could be done differently? It seems there are now budget concerns from the district as maintenance of the panels was it considered. From that community posts that I have seen, everyone is extremely upset at how much of an eyesore the solar panels are. The fence, which looks somewhat nice now, will quickly become weathered. Was the planting of natural slow growing and smaller in size

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landscaping considered? Seems like a lot could be learned from that experience before embarking on another project of the same nature.

In addition, it seems like a huge security concern to have a fenced off and hard to see into area so close to the school. It seems to be an open invitation for a hiding spot for those wanting to harm the students or school. Snipers? Child predators?

Lastly, why not the roofs? Why take valuable and expensive land away from schools? The fields are full on any given afternoon with sports activities, as well as being used on the weekends. Land is at a premium. Panels on roofs would be less of an eye sore and security threat.

In addition, updating zoning at this juncture to allow a school district to move forward with capital spend while the state, city, county, and country are facing tough financial times and general uncertainty towards the future seems ill advised and tone deaf as to what is going on in the world around us. Schools should be focused on chrome books and e-curriculum... not solar panels!

Please do not approve this pending item without filling thinking through and exploring the above concerns.

Mr. Sula closed the floor to the public.

Mr. Sula asked if placing the solar panels on the roof of the school was considered.

Mr. Haydenberk indicated that the roofs would have needed to be upgraded.

Mr. Sula asked if these upgrades were structural.

Mr. Haydenberk indicated that it was really in relation to the age of the roof. He also noted that there are on-going maintenance associated with placing solar panels are placed on a roof.

Mr. Baugh stated that he was disappointed that no one from the School District was present regarding this project.

Mr. Pejsach indicated that he thought that Ms. Bos had some valid points. He also wished that someone from the School District was present as he's struggling to understand the rationale for this request, which takes away a considerable amount of land from the area where kids play. He noted that a 20-year commitment on the use of this area for these panels is a long time and questioned the impact on children with the elimination of their play areas.

Mr. Sula stated that the Board, with the review of this Special Use Permit request, cannot get into the review of the priorities of the school district.

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Mr. Winter stated that this is an accurate statement.

Mr. Pejsach noted concern with the aesthetics of the proposal and questioned whether this was a valid concern.

Mr. Sula noted that if there is factual testimony showing that the project (including aesthetics) will negatively impact property values, then it would relate to one of the standards that the PZB must consider when reviewing SUP requests.

Mr. Winter cautioned that the burden is high to prove that property values will be negatively impacted. He noted that the letter submitted by Ms. Bos does not provide a basis for making this determination.

Mr. Baugh stated he shares a lot of the concerns noted this evening and does not believe that this petition meets the SUP standards.

Mr. Pejsach stated that he does not believe that a large scale solar farm is compatible with the residential area to the south.

Mr. Garrity stated that he does not see a lot of reasons to disapprove this request. But he noted that it is not allowed by right.

Mr. Winter advised that, as the request is for a Special Use Permit, what must be considered is whether or not the use is suitable for the particular location.

Mr. Pejsach stated that he is a supporter of solar panels, but that this request does not fit with the land use in the surrounding area. He asked if this request was supported by the parents of children at the school.

Mr. Sula indicated that the School District is the petitioner, so the School Board would have had to approve of this matter at one of their meetings.

Mr. Baugh stated that the SUP standard that the use be compatible with surrounding land uses is not being met. He noted that he does not believe the solar panels are compatible with the residential to the south, nor is it compatible with the school use (i.e., as indicated by the elaborate fence used to cordon off the panels).

Mr. Sula asked if the PZB members had any additional comments or questions. There were none.

Mr. Garrity motioned, seconded by Mr. Nordentoft, to forward a favorable recommendation on

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the petition of Woodland School District 50 for a Special Use Permit to allow the installation of a ground-mounted solar energy system on the Woodland Intermediate School Property located at 1115 North Hunt Club Road.

Mr. Sula asked if there was any discussion on the motion; as there was not, a vote was taken.

Roll Call Vote:

Ayes: Sula

Nays: Baugh, Garrity, Paff, Pejsach, Reilly, and Nordentoft

Abstain: None

Motion Failed: 1-6-0

5. Next Meeting Date: April 15, 2020

Mr. Ziegler indicated that there are several public hearings scheduled for the April 15th meeting.

6. Public Comment

There were no public comments.

7. Adjournment

Mr. Baugh motioned, seconded by Mr. Pejsach, to adjourn the meeting.

Voice vote:

All "Ayes," no "Nays," None abstaining

Motion carried: 7-0-0

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Joann Metzger,
Recording Secretary, Planning and Zoning Board