

FRANKLIN COUNTY PLANNING BOARD

April 9, 2019

The Franklin County Planning Board held its regular monthly meeting on Tuesday, April 9, 2019 in the Franklin County Administration Building, Commissioners Meeting Room, 113 Market Street, Louisburg, North Carolina.

Present: Mark McArn, William Holden, Johnnie Sledge, Robert Mann, Martha Mobley, Melissa Cogliatti, Ricky May, and Steven Buescher

Staff: Scott Hammerbacher, Katie Rhyne, and Brad Thompson

Chairman Mark McArn called the meeting to order at 7:00 P.M., and welcomed everyone in attendance. He introduced Melissa Cogliatti and welcomed her to the Planning Board.

Robert Mann gave the invocation.

A motion to approve the agenda and minutes from February 12, 2019 was made by Johnnie Sledge and was seconded by Ricky May. The motion passed by a vote of 8-0.

Agenda Items:

1. Ricky May recused himself.

19-SUP-01: Brad Thompson presented a Special Use Permit request from Carolina Solar Energy, LLC to construct a solar energy farm on 21.43 +/- acres of a 62-acre parcel located off Tides Ln located off NC 39 HWY in the Louisburg Township.

The application states the solar facility will be built to meet all local, state, and fire codes. The site will be visited by Technicians once a quarter to ensure safety and proper operation. The grounds will be properly maintained to ensure aesthetics. The facility poses minimum impact to the parcel and the land can be easily restored to its original use upon completion of the lease. Additionally within the application, the applicant has provided a financial assurance of decommissioning. Removal of the facility will not cause any changes to the site as it exists now.

The submitted site plan indicates there will be no outdoor lighting, and reflects the landscaping and buffer strips, fencing, and required parking.

The subject property is located within the Tar-Pamlico river basin and is required to meet nutrient regulations for nitrates and phosphates. There is a stream and 100 year flood zone located along the northern property line of the property with a 50 foot riparian buffer that appears to be located outside the proposed solar array.

The Comprehensive Land Use Plan has designated this area as Agriculture/ Residential.

Should the Planning Board recommend approval of the Special Use request, planning staff would recommend that it be done so with the following conditions:

1. Prior to securing building permits from the County, documentation from all other applicable state and federal agencies shall be submitted to the Franklin County Planning & Inspections Department verifying permit approval.
2. Approval from the North Carolina Utilities Commission
3. Final Tar/Pamlico stormwater plan approval.
4. An engineering estimate for the removal of the facility will need to be submitted in addition to a financial surety prior to the issuance of building permits. The financial surety shall not have an expiration date.
5. Approval of a North Carolina Department of Transportation driveway permit.
6. No lighting shall be installed without approval from the Franklin County Planning & Inspections staff. If lighting is needed, lighting shall be directed so that it does not spill over onto adjacent property or right-of-way. All lighting is subject to approval by the Franklin County Planning & Inspections Department.
7. Screening shall conform to Article 14. Landscape Requirements and Article 8., Section 8-1, Note 6. Buffer Strips. (As shown on the site plan, existing vegetation is being used where feasible to satisfy this requirement. It shall remain in place or landscaping shall be installed at a minimum of six (6) feet tall at time of planting.) Planning Staff may require additional landscape buffering around the perimeter of the site if existing vegetation is not sufficient. This shall be installed prior to final inspection and approval.
8. Approval from local fire department for Knox box.
9. Approval of final layout and design of all solar panels and associated structures (substations/inverters/transformers) shall be submitted for review to the Franklin County Planning Department prior to the issuance of building permits.
10. All substations/inverters/transformers shall not exceed a noise level of 60 dB (decibels) at property line.
11. Sedimentation and erosion control plan approval.
12. Prior to issuance of zoning and building permits a Landscape/Conservation Easement shall be recorded where existing vegetation is being used to satisfy the buffer requirement. Buffer must be located outside of the security fence.

Johnnie Sledge asked if the Solar Farm would require the Town of Louisburg's approval.

Scott Hammerbacher stated that the proposed Solar Farm fell within the County's jurisdiction and would not be subject to the Town of Louisburg's zoning regulations.

Johnnie Sledge stated that he had concerns with the maintenance of the trees required for the solar farm. He stated that a solar farm off NC Hwy 39 had a lot of dead trees.

Scott Hammerbacher explained that Franklin County performed a yearly inspection on the status of the solar farms in its jurisdiction, and the solar farm in question was in the Town of Bunn's zoning jurisdiction.

Carson Harkrader (Carolina Solar Energy, LLC 400 W Main St. STE 503 Durham, NC 27701)

Mrs. Harkrader explained that the Solar Farm had been approved for an extension twice and had not received approval from Duke Energy until recently. She stated that the solar farm was reduced in acreage.

Melissa Cogliati asked what the estimated lifespan of the solar farm was, and asked what would happen to the land afterward.

Mrs. Harkrader stated that there was a 25 year lease with the property owner for the installation of the solar farm. She explained that the panels were estimated to be able to last for 35-40 years, and the material would be recycled after its use. Carolina Solar Energy had submitted a decommissioning plan. The owner of the Solar Farm would be responsible for decommissioning it.

Melissa Cogliati stated that she had heard concerns about zinc in the soil affecting future crops.

Mrs. Harkrader stated that North Carolina State University had done tests on soil that had been impacted by crushed up materials that made up the solar facility, and they had discovered that only pea plants were affected. She explained that the solar facility would increase the property value due to the property coming out of farm exemption. The solar panels had a partial tax exemption, not the land.

Johnnie Sledge asked if the solar facility had a 70% tax exemption.

Mrs. Harkrader stated that the property would come out of the agricultural exemption, and the property taxes would be paid for, as well as rollback taxes. She explained that the panels had an 80% tax exemption.

Scott Hammerbacher stated that the property value would likely increase from the change of use.

Brad Thompson stated that he had previously worked for the tax office. He explained that the taxes would greatly increase for the property since the use would change to commercial.

Steven Buescher made a motion to recommend approval of the solar farm with the recommended conditions as submitted by planning staff. Martha Mobley seconded the motion. The motion passed with a vote of 7-0.

2. In other business, Scott Hammerbacher stated that the proposed solar farm would go before the Franklin County Board of Commissioners on Monday, May 20.

Scott Hammerbacher stated that the 401 widening project section D that would widen 401 from Royale to Louisburg was expected to receive funding shortly.

Scott Hammerbacher stated that the Franklin County Comprehensive plan had been approved for funding. The plan is scheduled to be completed at the end of the calendar year. He stated that the first steering committee had recently met.

Mark McArn stated that he was a part of the steering committee and that it was a very diverse.

Martha Mobley asked if there was a presence of individuals with agricultural backgrounds in the committee.

Scott Hammerbacher stated that there was.

With no further business before the Board, Chairman Mark McArn adjourned the meeting at 7:22 PM.

Mark McArn – Chairman
Franklin County Planning Board

Katie Rhyne – Clerk
Franklin County Planning Board