

MINUTES OF A JOINT WORKSHOP OF THE
INDEPENDENCE PLANNING COMMISSION AND CITY COUNCIL
TUESDAY APRIL 19, 2016 – 5:30 P.M.

1. CALL TO ORDER

Pursuant to due call and notice thereof, Chair Phillips called a joint workshop of the Independence Planning Commission and City Council to order at 5:30 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

PRESENT: Chair Phillips, Commissioners Olson, Palmquist, Gardner and Thompson, Mayor Johnson, Councilmembers Spencer, Betts, McCoy and Grotting

STAFF: City Planner Kaltsas, City Administrative Assistant Horner

ABSENT: None

VISITORS: LuAnn Brenno

3. KALTSAS STATED THERE WOULD NOT BE A FORMAL AGENDA FOR THE WORKSHOP PORTION OF THE MEETING; RATHER HE WOULD INTRODUCE TOPICS FOR AN INFORMAL DISCUSSION BETWEEN THE PLANNING COMMISSIONERS AND CITY COUNCILMEMBERS.

Kaltsas said this is an opportunity to discuss the solar ordinance being developed. He noted there have been two public hearings to date. Kaltsas said analysis and language around an ordinance have been discussed as four applications for solar gardens are being evaluated. Parcels in the City that could accommodate larger scale solar systems were examined and there were found to be around 75 parcels that would fit the criteria of 30 acres or larger. There are a limited number of parcels that could accommodate a solar garden. Betts asked if that study included wetland areas and Kaltsas said that it did include those areas.

Phillips said that discussing this topic, as a group was important before drafting language, as it is a difficult topic. He said it is best to have a strategy moving forward so citizens know what they can and cannot do. Phillips said there are five components addressed based on zoning and not based on guidance. Kaltsas said it was based on zoning. Kaltsas said $\frac{3}{4}$ of the City is zoned agriculture but there are also areas guided rural residential but zoned agriculture.

Johnson said solar was a hot topic at the National League of Minnesota Cities with many cities noting the solar gardens they have coming in and the tax dollars they generate for the City. He said they are favored over windmills as windmills can be noisy.

Betts asked how they were subsidized. Kaltsas said the federal subsidies are taken on the front end. He said there is a 30% tax credit given to the systems. He said leases range but may be between 20-25 years and as far as sustainability beyond that for these systems there is not historical data. Betts asked how they are insured. Kaltsas said that insurance would fall on the developer. He noted the panels are warranted for 20 years against hail, etc.

McCoy stated that it is not a question of whether solar is good or bad but rather why would the City change something that is zoned agriculture to not agriculture. McCoy stated it gives the landowner an opportunity financially as would commercial syrup production or fixing farm equipment as a business. He asked if a neighbor would be allowed to put in a 5-megawatt natural gas tank, which would produce energy more

cheaply than solar panels. McCoy referenced the August 15, 2015 decision when the City stated no green energy would be allowed to be produced by wind energy. He noted wind energy is cheaper than solar. McCoy stated the City has taken a conservative approach to what is allowed on Ag properties in the past and has limited it to riding stables and golf courses. He said bed and breakfasts, event centers and sport complexes have all been turned down in the past. McCoy feels that allowing solar would deviate from what the City has allowed in the past.

Phillips said the problem is that solar comes in all shapes and sizes. He does not want to deter the single-family use on their home but notes that is a lot different from having forty acres of solar panels. McCoy said the difference is the personal use versus generating power for a power plant. Gardner stated it is a start-up industry with the government throwing money at it for development in its infant stage. Gardner said the investment in these systems is huge and he feels the City needs to wait for more information. He cited the examples in Nevada where some have been pulling out of these efforts. Grotting asked if the individual could sell these systems back but Kaltsas said that would depend on the provider. McCoy stated Excel could put a surcharge on to the customer.

Grotting stated he sees the difference between a landowner producing his or her own energy versus a large infrastructure creating energy as a sellable resource. Phillips said he disagreed. He said if he put up 40 panels on his own dime, it would not make a difference to a neighbor whether he financed it or a company from San Francisco did that the effect on them would be the same.

Kaltsas said the wind energy ordinance was clarified to allow wind energy as a CUP in Ag districts only and not rural residential. He noted decorative windmills are allowed if they meet the guidelines. Betts stated CUP's are inspected and enforced.

Kaltsas stated there has not been much push back on building integrated solar. He said there could be issues with building mounted depending on the neighboring properties view. He noted if a rambler has solar on the roof and the neighboring property is a two story then they would see it.

Kaltsas noted the recent article outlining how the City of Minnetonka is looking to implement solar for their own purposes not residential energy. He said they were looking at putting it on their public works building but found out the roof would need to be replaced first.

Spencer stated this meeting was not to analyze the business model but rather from a planning perspective as it pertains to zoning and nuisance issues. He said they need to get something on the books in regards to the smaller scale models. Spencer said they could consider what neighboring cities are doing in regards to the smaller scale models to get some general direction. He noted there was not a lot of Ag zoned areas within the City that would be within the Excel service area. Spencer asked it would benefit the City to create an ordinance that would only apply to a very small area.

Phillips said the Planning Commission would do the best they can and would send the Council their work.

7. ADJOURN.

Respectfully Submitted,

Trish Bemmels, Recording Secretary

City of Independence
Planning Commission Meeting Minutes
5:30 p.m., April 19, 2016