

Joint Planning Board Meeting
February 25, 2025

The meeting of the Joint Planning Board of LeSauk Township and the City of Sartell was called to order by Chairman Dan Heim at 5:30 p.m. at the Sartell Community Center, Liberty Room.

PRESENT: LeSauk Township Supervisors Dan Heim, Jeff Westerlund and Paul Wagner, City of Sartell Joint Planning Board members Ryan Fitzthum and Rusty Deters, Recording Secretary Marlyce Plante and 12 interested parties.

AGENDA: DAN HEIM MOTIONED TO APPROVE THE AGENDA AS PRESENTED, SECOND BY JEFF WESTERLUND, MOTION CARRIED 5-0.

APPROVAL OF 12-10-24 JOINT PLANNING BOARD MEETING MINUTES

DAN HEIM MOTIONED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE DECEMBER 10, 2024 JOINT PLANNING BOARD MEETING AS PRESENTED, SECOND BY JEFF WESTERLUND, MOTION CARRIED 3-0. Ryan Fitzthum & Rusty Deters abstained since they were not in attendance.

Kevin & Deborah Traut – Minnesota Solar LLC Farm – Conditional Use Permit - Chairman Dan Heim read the public hearing notice filed by Kevin & Deborah Traut and the Minnesota Solar LLC (a company of Solar Stone). He opened the meeting to the floor.

Jeff Bertch, representative of the Solar Stone Company, gave a brief history of the Solar Stone company. They have just completed a 10-megawatt solar farm for the Rochester Public Utility company in Rochester, MN and constructed solar farms in several surrounding states. He explained the solar panels that are planned for the Traut project are called trackers that follow the sun. They are approximately 10-12 feet high, made of metal, glass & silicone in the panels. The panels reset each evening. The 5-megawatt solar farm is planned to be connected to the Xcel Energy grid, Granite City substation located on Pinecone Road. The panels are made to absorb the sun and have a very low glare. The property around the solar panels are planned to be a “low-mow” area along with having pollinator plants. A “low-mow” area is scheduled to be mowed 3-4 times per year.

David Schreiner, 3986 Riverside Ave. – Mr. Schreiner questioned Mr. Bertsch whether his company is based in Florida as it states on the Solar Stone website. He also questioned whether their company is receiving federal tax credits from the State of Minnesota for solar farms built in Minnesota, is a warranty on the panels, is the property being leased or purchased and what type and how high will the fence be around the solar farm. Mr. Bertsch answered the questions stating there are some federal tax credits but not the only reason to build here. Solar energy is being built in a wide variety of areas to replace carbon emissions. There is a 25-year warranty on the panels and the fencing will be a chain link, 8-foot high fence. As far as whether the land is being leased or purchased is information that can only be disclosed by the property owner, who has chosen not to divulge that information.

Rod Traut, 3997 Riverside Ave. – Mr. Traut’s property is located directly to the east of the planned solar farm and he stated his concern about the glare from the panels. Mr. Bertsch stated the glare would be minimal due to the content of the panels.

Benno Kuhl, 348 Pine Ridge Road – Mr. Kuhl questioned breakage and replacement of the panels. Is there any type of liquid in the panels that if broken, would leach into the ground water. What happens to the panels when they are broken. Mr. Bertsch stated the panels contain no liquid, if panels are broken, they are replaced and the broken panels are taken away and recycled.

Matt Traut, 3953 Riverside Ave. – Mr. Traut also lives east of the proposed solar farm but farms the property with his parents, Roys & Mary-Barron Traut that is adjacent to the solar farm property. His and

his parents concern, is where the transmission line is planned. It is shown to be erected along a field road from the solar farm to the west to Pinecone Road. The Traut's questioned whether the line will be buried or above ground. They have recently constructed a pivoting irrigation system which pivots right across the field road and cannot be used if the transmission line is above ground. Mr. Bertsch stated the transmission line is planned to be above ground and they were unaware of the pivoting irrigation system. Kevin and Deborah Traut, who own the planned solar farm property, were of the understanding the transmission line was going to be buried.

Mary Barron-Traut, 3872 Pinecone Road – Ms. Traut informed the solar company they have buried a water pipeline from the irrigation system to their farm and they have a lease of the property where the field road and water pipe line is located. Ms. Traut questioned the shielding of the solar farm itself. She noted the solar farm that is presently located on Pinecone Road has changed hands several times and the bushes, grass etc. all of which have not been kept up. She stated she is not against the solar farm, but if an above ground transmission line is planned, their irrigation system essentially becomes unusable.

Stephanie Kuhl, 348 Pine Ridge Road – Ms. Kuhl states she is concerned about the setbacks to the surrounding property owners, their plans for shielding and buffering the area for the neighbors that have to put up with and look at the solar farm. She also is concerned whether there will be an impact on the property value of their homes. Dan Heim and Mr. Bertsch both indicated the company will be going through the buffering and esthetics to develop a landscaping plan for the solar farm. Mr. Bertsch said they have seen very little evidence of devaluation of properties with other solar farms they have constructed. The setbacks for the solar farm will be 200-feet from all properties. This same setback is listed in the Sartell and Stearns County ordinances for solar farms.

With no new comments from the floor, DAN HEIM MOTIONED TO CLOSE THE PUBLIC HEARING, SECOND BY JEFF WESTERLUND, MOTION CARRIED 5-0. Discussion was held by the Joint Planning Board. Mr. Westerlund stated the solar ordinance is new and the board is concerned for all township residents. Both Mr. Westerlund and Paul Wagner stated there will be electricity rate savings (approximately 10-20%) for Xcel customers who sign up to be a part of the solar farm.

Ryan Fitzthum discussed the concerns of the residents which are real, especially whether the transmission line will be buried versus an above-ground line. He also questioned whether a conditional use permit, which remains with the parcel forever, is the right way to handle the solar farm. Possibly issuing an interim use permit which would only be for a period of time. The screening of the solar farm is very important to the surrounding residents. These are all items that can be reviewed and set as conditions.

DAN HEIM MOTIONED TO RECOMMEND FOR APPROVAL THE RESOLUTION TO KEVIN AND DEBORAH TRAUT FOR A CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT TO CONSTRUCT AND OPERATE A SOLAR GARDEN IN THE PLAT OF TRAUT VALLEY FARMS WITH CLARIFICATION FROM ATTORNEY TROY GILCHRIST REGARDING ISSUING A CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT VERSUS AN INTERIM USE PERMIT AS WELL AS REVIEWING OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE TRANSMISSION LINE AND THE LANDSCAPING PLAN FOR THE SOLAR FARM, MOTION SECOND BY JEFF WESTERLUND, MOTION CARRIED 5-0.

David & Judy Traut Site Plan - Dan Heim gave a brief history of the Diamond T Farm plat which the Traut's did previously at the township level. The Traut's platted an 80+ acre parcel into two lots and are planning to construct a new home on Lot 2 of the Diamond T Farm plat. With the large lot, the Traut's have easily met all setbacks and have worked with Stearns County regarding the delineation of wetlands on the lot they are constructing their home on.

RYAN FITZTHUM MOTIONED TO APPROVE THE SITE PLAN FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW HOME PRESENTED BY DAVID AND JUDY TRAUT WHICH MEET ALL SETBACKS, SECOND BY DAN HEIM, MOTION CARRIED 5-0.

There being no further business, DAN HEIM MOTIONED TO ADJOURN, SECOND BY JEFF WESTERLUND, MOTION CARRIED 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,



Marlyce L. Plante

Joint Planning Board Recording Secretary