



**Planning Commission**  
**Gratiot County Department of Community Development**  
**214 E Center St., Ithaca, MI 48847**  
**Phone (989) 875-5201**

**Proposed Minutes of the May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2023 Meeting**

The Gratiot County Planning Commission held a meeting May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2023 beginning at 5:00 pm in the Circuit Court at Gratiot County Courthouse, 214 E Center St., Ithaca, MI 48847 [via Zoom]

1. Call to Order at 5:00 pm
2. Pledge of Allegiance
3. Roll Call:  
Present – Janell Dunham, David Justin, Rob Endter, Dan Manley, Karla Childers  
Absent – L. Quinn Lincoln-Keon, David Ringle
4. Approval of the Agenda:  
Board Action: Motion by David Justin, second by Rob Endter to approve Agenda.  
Motion Carried 5-0-2.
5. Approval of March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023 Minutes:  
Board Action: Motion by Janell Dunham, second by Dan Manley to approve minutes.  
Motion Carried 5-0-2.
6. Public Comment for Agenda Items
7. PA116 Application
  - a. Explanation of Mark Buerge Application for Parcel #11-022-026-00
  - b. Discussion/Questions
  - c. Vote Approval/Denial of Mark Buerge Application for Parcel #11-022-026-00  
Board Action: Motion by Dan Manley, second by Janell Dunham to approve PA116 Application for Parcel #11-022-026-00. Motion Carried 5-0-2.
8. Proposed Zoning Ordinance Amendment – Clinton County Moratorium
  - a. Explanation of Zoning Ordinance Amendment for Clinton County Moratorium
  - b. Discussion/Questions
  - c. Vote Recommendation of Approval/Approval with Conditions/Denial of Zoning Ordinance Amendment for Clinton County Moratorium  
Board Action: Motion by David Justin, second by Dan Manley to Recommend Approval of Zoning Ordinance Amendment for Clinton County Moratorium.  
Motion Carried 5-0-2.
9. Special Use Application – DTE “Polaris Solar Farm” Project
  - a. Statement on Conflicts of Interest

- i. Kyle O'Meara -- Conflicts of interest as discussed in by-laws, state-laws, etc. Emails and phone calls were made to each Planning Commission member; no conflict of interest was discovered.
- b. Overview of Review Process (Spicer)
  - i. Cynthia w. Spicer (Jenny and Jessica) – Presentation from DTE regarding application, walk through a review written by Spicer, PowerPoint presentation, open to public comment.
- c. Open Public Hearing at 5:10pm
- d. Explanation of Request (DTE)
  - i. Theresa Hannah (DTE) Application for North Star Township. DTE Reps are present for questions; James Mann (design and layout), Axel Olson (glare), Ryan Gurreri (sound), Dan Ejtinger (legal representative), Matt Wagner (DTE Rep).
    - 1. Solar Benefits – produces no air emissions, communities receive local tax revenue (police, school, roads, etc.), up to 200 jobs during construction and invest locally for materials
    - 2. Evaluation Phase – identified the area in June 2021, determined interest from land owners, collect data to characterize the site and understand potential constraints (endangered species, waterways, wetlands, land use, geology/soil testing, flood zones, cultural resource studies), design layout (DTE Best Practices) – tried to have setbacks further than required (tried to stay 300' away), submitted application (January 2023) – submit materials based on most recent information (all minor changes and updates were provided in the application).
      - a. Laydown yard – was supposed to be in Washington Township; makes more sense to now move the laydown yard 'across the street' to North Star township. In N.S. it is within the same footprint and would not be next to non-participants.
    - 3. Maps – Where is the project located? Secured land close to the substation, that has leftover capacity. Will not need to put in a new substation – DTE owns the existing substation. Overall project; 8 parcels, 230 acres, 45 megawatts, 7400 homes – land can be returned to agricultural use at the end of the lifespan.
    - 4. Construction Phase – DTE delivers construction materials in a time sequenced manner; with little impact to the land and surrounding environment.
    - 5. Installation & Testing – equipment is installed and then testing completed. Panels will be tracking with the sun; any noise from the inverters does not happen at night (no sun=no movement).
- e. Presentation of County Review Consultant Report (Spicer)
  - 1. December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2022 1<sup>st</sup> Submittal and April 2023 2<sup>nd</sup> Submittal

2. In Sections 34-36 of N. Star Township
3. Special Use Requirements and how the Application Applies
  - a. Districts – facilities proposed in the Agricultural and Industrial zoning districts
  - b. Construction Timeline – commence in 4 months, complete within 20 months
  - c. Graphical Demonstration – proposed existing conditions for 5 and 10 years out provided of evergreen trees
  - d. Security – 8' chain link fence
  - e. Potential Hazards – None
  - f. Electromagnetic Interference – None
  - g. Max Lot Coverage – Solar Farms are Exempt
  - h. Vegetation Maintenance – Around the panels will be maintained less than 18" under the panels and within 10' around the panels
  - i. Sound – Will not operate at night
4. Conditions of Approval
  - a. Project – Applicant needs to submit final drawings and specs of models of panels
  - b. Access Roads – provide a copy of permits, transportation plan, and maintenance plan
  - c. Environmental Analysis – obtain EGLE and Drain Commission Permits
  - d. Complaint Resolution
  - e. Decommissioning Plan – clarify life of project, current estimate includes restoration of permanent basins, decommissioning value should be equal to overall decommissioning costs not salvage values, include a clause to update the amount to address decommissioning cost increases throughout the life of the project
  - f. Height – final detailed drawings of panels and all components
  - g. Site Plan
  - h. Security Fence – Clarify their proposed perimeter fencing material.
  - i. Noise – noise study to show project is at or below the required noise levels (post construction)
  - j. Glare – Zoning Ordinance states concentrated glare not towards or onto nearby properties or roadways at any time. Current glare study shows glare on 13 homes and 2 roadways (without considering existing vegetation/topography/ other visual screening). Planning Commission needs to decide upon the appropriate level of response.

- k. Landscaping Screening/Buffering – How was the use of a 20’ vs. 30’ buffer decided? Which will be constructed? No landscaping buffer shown on the right hand sided of block 8 and 10. (Applicant “Existing vegetation acts as an adequate buffer – did not feel there was a need for more. 20’ buffer will be along the perimeter, 30’ will be along the perimeter of non-participating parcels)
  - l. Codes – provide copies of all necessary permits and comply with all local, state codes
  - m. Expiration – must be commenced within 24 months or Special Land Use Permit will expire.
  - n. Inspections – allow access to property at all reasonable times.
5. Additional Conditions
- a. As-Built Drawings
  - b. Project Movements – Minor changes reviewed by Z.A. or Planning Consultant
  - c. Transfer – approval granted to applicant can be transferred
  - d. Access Roads-Collection Lines – Alteration are allowed with landowner permission and all permits
  - e. Drain Agreement
  - f. Road Agreement
  - g. Continuing Ordinance Enforcement Escrow – funds in escrow for the life of the project to ensure applicant of the project meets all requirements
  - h. Repowering
  - i. Glare – post construction
- f. Open Hearing to Public Comment at 5:53pm
- i. Craig Hooper: Fill up State Road substation? *Megawatts of this project will fill the current capacity of the substation. How will piles driven into ground affect storm water? Study shows that drainage would not have a substantial impact, no foundations under the panels. Drain Commission expressed concerns so drain fields will be designed to protect the area. Mitigation efforts to track existing drain tile and repair if needed. Problem with glare; will DTE consider buying out nonparticipating parcels affected? Multiple stages of mitigation to address glare issues; vegetation, altering angle of tracks of panels. Repairs completed at night? Only in the instance of emergencies; all other repairs will be during the day. Steel, cable, and panels bought locally, from Gratiot County? We will have accounts at all local hardware; major material will be outsourced, but everything possible will be bought local. How does North Star and Gratiot County get revenue from the Solar Farm? Jim Wheeler – Depreciation is different than wind turbines. Depreciation follows 15 years all the way down to 23% then levels out.*

- ii. Jennifer Upshaw, Glare will come at my house, who will take care of the rest of the land (beyond the 10')? Concerns of mosquitoes and overgrowth. *Landowners take care of the land outside of the screening. Farmers will be able to utilize the land not in use by the Solar Farms; all the way up to the 'fence'. Fence is designed so that farm and maintenance equipment can fit.*
- iii. Evan 7303 Gratiot Rd. Saginaw MI: Represent 200 Members of Saginaw, Gratiot, and Tuscola. Jobs for the local people; infusion during before and after (tax dollars, restaurants, gas stations) of \$, bring people home to local jobs, new employees (trades are hot right now) is a great way for younger generation to be introduced into apprenticeship programs. *100-200 Jobs are projected.*
- iv. William Holzchuh: Proposed Life of Project? *30 years* That 300' from non-participating properties from property line or structures? *From Structures.*
- v. Ron Cuthbert: Will there be other areas for solar farms? Gratiot County is known for agriculture, why would we destroy that? Should honor the lands in PA116. *No PA116 property is a part of this project in North Star.*
- vi. Mike: Sierra Club-Environmental Organization in the United States. Largest alternative is coal energy – very damaging to the environment as opposed to Solar energy. Farm land about 8-10% is used for ethanol; electrical cars would diminish farm land use to 2% and the rest for food. Solar energy is better compared to coal and nuclear energy.
- vii. John Hardman 1588 S Blair Rd. North Star Supervisor; as a board we support the project. Fences should be decorative. Tax depreciation table should be evaluated and taken into account.
- g. Close Hearing to Public Comment 6:07pm
- h. Discussion/Questions to Applicant and Staff (Spicer)
  - i. Rob Endter – Glare; how many solar farms are running in the area? How many glare complaints for the life of your projects?  
Matt Wagner – Lapeer Solar is 50MW for DTE, running for 8 years. Not many complaints, but for the ones that came in, we mitigated with vegetation installation.
  - ii. Dan Manley – Sound; does the sound study show the combination of solar and wind turbines? Can glare be regulated?  
What type of vegetation will be used/will it die in the winter?  
James Mann – New study looks at both alone and combined. Solar invertors do not add to the sound produced from the study (all sound is from the turbines but does go over the solar limit).  
Trackers in panels are fixed (no movement), several ways to deal with glare – vegetation, program tracks of panels to avoid glare if expected or projected to hit a house or road.  
Matt Wagner – If vegetation dies, we replace it. Will primarily use evergreen.

- iii. David Justin – distance of inverters from panels/substation  
DTE Rep – 40-50'
- i. Close Public Hearing at 6:25
- j. Vote on Approval/ Approval with Conditions/Denial of Special Use Application – DTE “Polaris Solar Farm” Project  
Board Action: Motion by Janell Dunham second by David Justin to Approve with Conditions Outlined in the Resolution 301 the Special Use Application – DTE “Polaris Solar Farm” Project. Motion Carried Rob Endter Karla Childers, Janell Dunham, Dan Manley, Davide Justin. All YES.

**10. Old Business:**

- a. Zoning Complaints: March (0), April (0)
- b. Zoning Permits Issued March: Elba (0), Hamilton (0), Lafayette (1), Newark (0), North Star (0), Sumner (1)
- c. Zoning Permits Issued April: Elba (0), Hamilton (0), Lafayette (0), Newark (4), North Star (0), Sumner (2)

**11. New Business:**

**12. Committee and Special Reports:**

**13. Adjournment:**

Board Action: Motion by David Justin, second by Janell Dunham to adjourn at 6:51 p.m.  
Motion Carried 5-0-2.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Diandra Messer, recording secretary.

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X Date

Minutes respectfully Accepted by Janell Dunham, Secretary.

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X Date