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**Casco Township Planning Commission**

**Regular Meeting**

**June 21, 2023**

**6:00 PM**

**Casco Township Hall**

Members Present: Andy **Litts**, Greg **Knisley**, Irene **Wood**, Ryan **Brush**, Dan **Fleming**, Kelly **Hecker**

Members Absent: Dian **Liepe**

Audience: Zoning Administrator Tasha **Smalley**, Derek **Nofz**, Andrew **Aldridge**, Ryan **Carrigan** Mike **Baker**; Nederveld, Victoria **Villwock**, Patrick **Smith**, Greg **Styler**, Allan **Overhiser**, Paul **Macyauski**, Tim **Lubbers**, Henry **Cisco**, a few other unidentified audience members.

1. Call to order: Meeting was called to order by Chairman **Litts** 6:00PM
2. Review and approve agenda: A motion was made by **Hecker** to approve the agenda, supported by **Fleming**. All in favor. Motion carried.
3. Public comment: None
4. Correspondence: None
5. Approval of Minutes: A motion was made by **Knisley** to approve the May 17, 2023 minutes, supported by **Litts**. All in favor. Motion carried.
6. Public Hearing: None
7. New Business
  - a. Presentation by Consumers Energy Re: Casco Township being a potential Solar Farm Area.

Derek **Nofz** the community and governmental affairs manager for Consumers Energy (CE) in southwest Michigan began the presentation by stating that CE's Clean Energy plan is a 20 year strategic road map to meeting the State's energy needs while protecting the environment. The goal is to add 8,000 megawatts of competitively bid, utility scale, solar power to boost renewable energy and help achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2040. He provided the PC members a packet with some general solar farm ordinance provision ideas that are conducive for solar development.

Andrew **Aldridge** & Ryan **Carrigan** also attended the meeting as representatives of CE. **Aldridge** works with the Special Land Use (SLU) applications and encouraged the PC to use him as a resource to develop a Solar Farm ordinance. **Carrigan** is also a Zoning Administrator in Vergennes and Grattan Township in Kent County and could provide a template of the ordinance(s) he has developed in his communities and provide some insight into any issues that he has experienced.

**Litts** asked if solar farms would be profitable if the government was not providing incentives. **Carrigan** responded that the State and Federal renewable standards are increasing and that the costs to construct a solar farm have dropped in the past ten years, while Nuclear and Gas have increased.

**Woods** asked how much acreage would be required. **Carrigan** responded that a community scale farm would produce 10 megawatts or less and would need six-seven acres per megawatt. A utility scale farm would produce 100 megawatts (600-700 acres) and would have substations with underground lines to collectors; and need to be located by electric transmission lines. This size facility could bridge jurisdiction lines.

**Carrigan** also explained that any environmental studies required by the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) would be provided by CE, as part of the permitting process. Most often a study is required to determine if threatened or endangered species will be impacted by loss of habitat.

**Kinsley** asked how multiple sites would be connected. **Carrigan** responded that there are feeders under the modules that go underground to a combiner box and inverter and overhead at the substations to the transmission lines. **Woods** asked if CE would employ the use of Eminent Domain if an adjacent property owner did not agree to allow CE to use their land to connect non-contiguous sites. **Carrigan** responded that CE would not do that because they can use the road Right-of-Way (ROW). Typically, property owners agree to a 20-30 year lease with a possibility to extend it another 10 years. This lease is recorded as an easement on the property and would not change if the property was sold.

**Woods** asked if there would be an escrow account that would cover the decommissioning of the farms. **Carrigan** explained that there is usually a 10-15 Million dollar surety bond and that every 5 years the operator provides an updated cost study.

**Kinsley** asked if CE builds the facilities. **Carrigan** stated that it could be built by individual entities that can sell the power to CE or CE could manage the facility themselves. **Kinsley** asked if these kinds of farms would be a major source of the power supply or only supplementing it. **Carrigan** stated that for the next 10-20 years Solar energy should provide the majority of the supply, with gas & oil powered energy plants making up the rest. Battery storage of any excess supply could also provide for demand when solar production is not at its peak.

**Woods** asked if the energy produced by farms in Casco Township would be allocated to the community. **Carrigan** explained that it would depend on the local usage. **Kinsley** asked if there were any downsides to a solar farm, like reflection or increased heat. **Carrigan** mentioned things like glare and appearance were the typical concerns voiced by residents. CE would provide screening for non-participating land owners to address those kinds of complaints.

**Carrigan** went on to say that CE was looking to help develop a solar farm ordinance that is not overly prescriptive. The bi-facial modules and the pipes that mount them to the ground do not have an environmental impact and can easily be removed to return the land to a tillable state. Simulations are performed using meteorological data, the number of sunny days in the locale, and topography to determine the best areas to install these farms.

**Litts** asked if the equipment would be locally sourced. **Carrigan** responded that the equipment was mostly sourced domestically and that CE is a local company that would use local vendors for construction maintenance and repairs.

**Litts** asked how viable Casco Township was for a utility scale solar farm. **Carrigan** explained that even on cloudy days the modules will still generate electricity. **Carrigan** added that power needs to be generated locally since we are a peninsula that can only bring in a power supply from the south. **Kinsley** asked if Palisades or the coal plant in Muskegon reopened would the demand remain. **Carrigan** responded that the demand is always going up.

**Smalley** reminded the PC that the Federal government has renewable energy requirements that have to be met. **Litts** asked what the construction timeline would look like. **Carrigan** explained that once the project gets SLU approval it takes approximately 18 months to construct. Red tape, procurement, and logistics could draw a project out even longer but creating an ordinance is the first step. Once the project is complete a farm would operate for 30 years, at most, losing about 1% efficiency each year. **Carrigan** also stated that CE already has replacement parts built into the cost and usually purchases extra equipment at the beginning of the project to make any necessary repairs, without transferring these costs to the consumer.

**Woods** would like to see a map of the transmission power lines in the township so they can incorporate an ideal area for these facilities into the master plan. **Woods** also requested a sample of a lease agreement and a decommissioning agreement. **Fleming** would like to know what Federal incentives are being provided, such as: Investment and Production tax credits.

**Smalley** reminded the PC that **Bultje** had also submitted a Sample Ordinance that Robinson Township in Ottawa County uses to regulate Solar Energy Collectors and

Systems. **Litts** suggested a special meeting or subcommittee to work on the ordinance. **Woods** and **Hecker** volunteered to work on the project and update the PC at a special meeting on a fourth Wednesday of the month.

## 8. Old Business

a. **Cisco**, 68th St., Sand Mine Special Land Use (SLU). **Smalley** reported that Nederveld had not had enough time to respond to GEI's most recent letter regarding the well(s) construction and logs. **Baker** commented that GEI is also asking for more information on the water table level but Nederveld has provided all of the info they currently have. The water table fluctuates and hiring an environmental consultant to calculate those additional details would be an added cost to **Cisco**. **Cisco** asked if the PC and/or GEI would even accept his findings if he provided the additional info or would he have to have another firm confirm the report(s).

**Woods** stated that there were two main concerns, voiced by the local residents, which need to be addressed. And, those were the safety of the kids walking to their bus stop and air/water quality. **Woods** asked what the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) standards were and how it would be monitored. **Baker** did not have that information at this time. **Woods** told **Cisco** that he should go to the School bus garage and get it in writing that the bus would pick up and drop the kids off at their driveways instead of at the end of the dirt road. The possibility of changing the truck route hours, to avoid bus stop pick up and drop off times, was also discussed.

**Kinsley** asked if the sand mine would be manned at all times and if the trucks were scheduled for certain days and times or if they could show up anytime the mine was open. **Lubbers** explained that the gate would be unlocked in the morning and locked at the end of the day, but there may not always be someone on site. **Kinsley** commented that it would be hard to regulate the amount of trucks per day if no one was onsite and that it would create an attractive nuisance if no one was there to keep the kids out.

**Litts** told **Baker** that he appreciated the updated plans but stated that the narrative needs clarification as to the hours of operation, number of trucks allowed per day, and the number of yards allowed to be removed per day. **Litts** also wants more detail on how the reclamation plan would be managed. **Hecker** commented that she think the PC keeps asking for more and should clarify exactly what they want.

**Litts** reported that the Township has looked into the budget and has the funds to pave the portion of 68<sup>th</sup> St that is on the truck haul route. **Litts** stated that it would cost about \$790,000.00 to prep the road and \$300,000.00-400,000.00 to pave it. **Overhiser** remarked that the Board was supportive of paying for the improvements. The work could tentatively start in 2025 and could be completed by the end of that summer.

**Lubbers** commented that he had talked to the Road commission and that; meanwhile, they could change the contract with the township for additional dust control applications, at an added cost of approximately \$500.00 per application. **Litts** asked if Cisco would pave the 200' of his driveway if the Township paved the road. **Lubbers** agreed.

**Fleming** asked if the empty trucks would need to stick to the “haul” route. The PC agreed that empty trucks headed to the mine could get there any way they liked and did not have to come in via 109<sup>th</sup> and 68<sup>th</sup>. **Lubbers** asked if the speed limit in that area of 68<sup>th</sup> could be reduced during school hours. **Litts** responded that only the State Police have the authority to change that.

**Litts** wants Nederveld to formally respond to GEI before an approval is given; commenting that the water table level information is too ambiguous. **Lubbers** remarked that the level was only as accurate as the weather. **Litts** suggested that the PC schedule a special meeting on July 12th to discuss the conditions for the sand mine approval. **Litts** would like **Bultje** to attend the special meeting, if available.

b. Discussion regarding minimum dwelling requirements and Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU). Considering lowering the current minimum dwelling size which is currently 1000 square feet. **Fleming** commented that the PC would need have good reasons why they made any decisions to change the minimum dwelling size. **Wood** reminded the PC that the dwellings would have to have permanent foundations and a Certificate of Occupancy, per the Michigan Residential code. **Woods** suggested tabling the matter for a later date since they need to wrap up the sand mine approval, Solar Farm ordinance, and other text amendments that they have been working on.

## 9. Administrative reports

Zoning Administrator – **Smalley** presented her invoice for her time, which delineates last month’s billings for services provided.

Board – **Fleming** reported that the noise ordinance had been updated from 10pm to 11:30pm and that the gathering Ordinance had been updated from a max of 50 people to 250 people. He also reported that the free tire day will be on August 19<sup>th</sup>. **Overhiser** mentioned that the Board was reviewing consultants for the Master Plan review. **Fleming** also reported that the US Supreme Court has determined that wetlands have to actually be attached to a water source to be considered protected.

ZBA – **None**

## 10. Public comment

A complaint was made regarding trucks coming and going from Bowie’s sand mine.

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Styler asked if the Cisco mine truck route had been approved yet. He opposed to the currently proposed route.

11. Adjourn at 9:05 pm:

Motion was made to adjourn. All in favor. Motion carried.

Attachments: available upon request

Minutes prepared by:

Jennifer Goodrich, Recording Secretary