



## MEETING MINUTES

### Planning and Zoning Commission

Tuesday, July 14, 2015

4:00 PM

City Hall, 200 Rusk Street, Council Chambers

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Chair: Lynn Monden  
Commissioners Present: Emanuel Albarado, Nathan Dempsey, Cal Koontz, Teresa McElreath, and Phil Neelly  
Commissioner Absent: Bill Williams  
Staff Present: Linda Ames and Julie Smith  
Visitors Present: None

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#### **Item 1 - Declaration of Quorum**

With a quorum present, Chair Monden called the meeting to order at 4:02 pm.

#### **Item 2 - Approval of Minutes for June 9, 2015**

Commissioner McElreath moved to approve the minutes from the June 9, 2015, meeting as presented by staff; Commissioner Koontz seconded the motion. All present voted AYE. Motion carried unanimously.

#### **Item 3 – Zoning Classification**

Chair Monden read the item into the record:

**Consider and make a recommendation to City Council for the appropriate zoning district classification(s) for urban solar farms.**

Community Services Director Julie Smith presented a presentation to the Commission about urban solar farms. She described the growth in the solar sector over the last ten years in Texas and explained that solar energy was finding a niche especially as a “peaking” power. In other words, though solar generation made up only a small percentage of the energy sector, it was effectively helping to shave off the peak demand making the overall grid more reliable.

Often, she said, solar farms are located immediately next to the load, or demand, they are serving. Some serve commercial uses, such as distribution centers, while others serve residential uses, such as subdivisions. Very large solar farms operate as power plants and provide power directly to the grid for distribution. CSD Smith provided some examples of both including solar farms in Pflugerville, Austin, and the State’s leader in solar power, San Antonio.

CSD Smith further explained that solar farms entailed installing and connecting solar panels to create an array on several acres (or thousands of acres, depending on the size of the farm). Because of the investment, these facilities are often in place for many years. Siting such facilities are challenging for communities.

CSD Smith proposed staff's recommendation to regulate solar farms as the City Zoning Ordinance regulates wind farms: require an SUP and allow only in Agriculture, Outdoor Commercial, and Industrial zoning districts. Both of these (wind and solar) generate power, require substantial capital investment, and generally use large tracts of land. She also proposed the following definition be added to the Zoning Ordinance:

“Solar Energy Facility or Solar Farm – a complete design or assembly consisting of a solar energy collector or collectors, an energy storage facility (where used), and components for the distribution of transformed energy and which facility devotes more than 50% of the property on which it is located to solar electric power generation primarily for use off-site.”

Commissioner McElreath inquired whether such an installation would generate jobs in Gainesville.

CSD Smith replied that the construction of such a site has the potential to generate jobs. However, other than occasional routine maintenance, smaller solar farms aren't generally staffed on site (not unlike the fracking of a well; once developed, there is no need to man a well site). The sector as a whole is growing in terms of job generation across the state, but she did not expect much job growth locally. Solar farms are generally self-sufficient other than maintenance.

Commissioner Neelly commented that solar is viewed as an environmentally friendly alternative to fossil fuels; however, he reminded the Commission to keep in mind how much land might be required to produce how much energy.

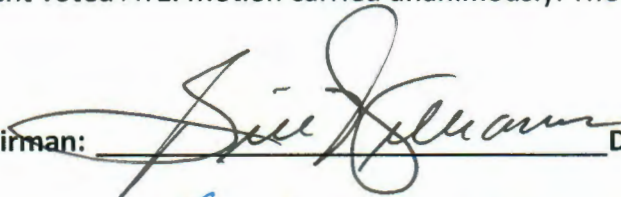
CSD Smith added that it is also unclear what tax benefits the City might realize from such facilities, because of potential tax incentives for solar development.

Commissioner Neelly moved to accept staff's recommendation and recommend City Council require solar farms to obtain a Special Use Permit (SUP) and be limited to Agriculture, Outdoor Commercial, and Industrial zoning districts. Commissioner Dempsey seconded the motion. All present voted AYE. Motion carried unanimously.

#### **ITEM 4 – Adjourn Regular Meeting**

Chair Monden moved to adjourn the regular meeting; Commissioner McElreath seconded the motion. All present voted AYE. Motion carried unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 4:28 pm.

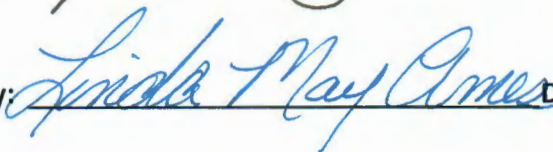
Signature of Chairman:



Date:

7.14.15

Signature of Secretary:



Date:

14 July 2015