

## PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES - CITY OF INVER GROVE HEIGHTS

Tuesday, July 2, 2019 – 7:00 p.m.  
City Hall Chambers - 8150 Barbara Avenue

Chair Maggi called the Planning Commission meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Commissioners Present: Armando Lissarrague  
Elizabeth Niemioja  
Dennis Wippermann  
Pat Simon  
Annette Maggi  
Joan Robertson

Commissioners Absent: Jonathan Weber (excused)  
Brett Kramer (excused)  
Tony Scales (excused)

Others Present: Allan Hunting, City Planner  
Heather Botten, Associate Planner

### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

The minutes from the May 21, 2019 and June 4, 2019 Planning Commission meetings were approved as submitted.

### **DENNIS ARNTSON (NATIONAL GUARD AND ARMORY) – CASE NO. 19-26V**

#### **Reading of Notice**

Commissioner Simon read the public hearing notice to consider the request for a variance to allow a solar array 30 feet from the front property line whereas 50 feet is required, for the property located at 8076 Babcock Trail. 4 notices were mailed.

#### **Presentation of Request**

Heather Botten, Associate Planner, explained the request as detailed in the report. She advised that the property is zoned P, Institutional and is 6.17 acres in size. The property is owned by the MN Department of Military Affairs and is connected to the Community Center. The parking lot is shared and there is a mutual agreement that the City maintains the grass area. The applicant is requesting a variance from the front yard setback to construct a solar array 30 feet from the front property line whereas 50 feet is the required setback. Ground and roof mounted solar systems are allowed in all districts but must comply with the underlying zoning district setbacks. In this case the 50-foot setback in the P district is to provide a buffer from the abutting properties as many structures in this district are quite large. The proposed 30-foot setback is similar with the setbacks for the surrounding residential properties. To reduce the visual impact of the solar array, screening is proposed to have either slatted material or vines. A practical difficulty can be found for the front setback due to the fact that the location of the array provides the owner the best location for direct sunlight while also providing a grass buffer between the Armory entrance and the array location. Staff recommends approval of the request with five conditions. Condition 5 has been amended to read that “The State shall remove the solar panels, footings, and underground wires and restore the area following the service life of the array.”

Chair Maggi asked why the applicants were proposing a ground mount versus roof mount solar array.

Ms. Botten replied that the applicant considered roof mounted as an option, but they prefer ground mounted as they are planning to replace the roof in a few years and there could be additional shading because of the higher roof over the gym floor.

**Opening of Public Hearing**

Dennis Arntson, 15000 Highway 115, Camp Ripley, advised he was available to answer any questions.

Chair Maggi asked the applicant if he read and understood the report.

Mr. Arntson replied in the affirmative. He stated regarding rooftop solar panels, they have had to go back and revise the roof structure on other buildings based on increased snow and wind loads, changing building codes, and rooftop units not being aesthetically pleasing because of the elevated solar field.

Commissioner Niemioja asked if the solar panels would move with the sun.

Mr. Arntson replied they would not.

Commissioner Simon asked if the turf under the solar array would need maintenance once the native grasses were established.

Mr. Arntson replied that it would be maintenance-free turf.

Commissioner Wippermann asked if the proposed solar array would provide electricity strictly to the part of the building occupied by the National Guard.

Mr. Arntson replied that they are disconnected from the community utility service and it would come off the National Guard's utility meter. He added that the Community Center has a solar system of their own on the building.

Commissioner Wippermann asked what percent of their electric needs could be supplied by the proposed solar array.

Mr. Arntson replied they anticipated 30%.

Commissioner Robertson asked if the building cost versus return was favorable.

Mr. Arntson replied that it would not be a fast payback, but was more about energy resiliency for the federal government.

Chair Maggi asked for clarification of ownership and maintenance of the land.

Ms. Botten replied that the State owns the land, but the City Parks Department maintains it.

Chair Maggi closed the public hearing.

**Planning Commission Discussion**

Commissioner Niemioja supported the State's foresight in installing a solar array.

**Planning Commission Recommendation**

Motion by Commissioner Niemioja, second by Commissioner Robertson, to approve the request for

a variance to allow a solar array 30 feet from the front property line whereas 50 feet is required, for the property located at 8076 Babcock Trail, with the conditions listed, including amended Condition 5, and the practical difficulty as listed in the staff report.

Motion carried (6/0). This item goes to the City Council on July 8, 2019.

The meeting was unanimously adjourned at 7:13 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kim Fox  
Recording Secretary