

PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING – JUNE 23, 2022

MASTER PLAN WORKSHOP –ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT

The meeting was called to order at 2:00pm by Chairperson Larry Shaffer.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Larry Shaffer, Nancy Griswold, Jenny Irvine, Lou Lundquist, Phil Bontrager, Jeff Cuthbertson, & Christine Lundquist

GUEST SPEAKER: Michael Larson, Asst. Director of Michigan Energy Options – Green Energy & Lighting UP (a statewide non-profit)

AGENDA: The meeting agenda was approved on a motion by Christine with support by Nancy.

MINUTES: The minutes of the June 21, 2022 meeting were reviewed. Christine noted that there is an updated set of minutes with Jenny’s last name spelled correctly. The minutes were approved on a motion by Lou with support from Phil.

PUBLIC COMMENT: There was no public comment at this time.

ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT PRESENTATION: Larry introduced Michael Larson, noting that he is an MPA and is on the Planning Commission for Marquette, Michigan. Michael indicated that his company works with Clean Energy options including solar, wind, water, and geothermal. His presentation today will primarily relate to solar energy options. He reviewed some of the concerns and benefits that are common including:

CONCERNS

Not enough sun
Too much land used
Winter/snow depth
Habitat/environmental impact

BENEFITS

Passive/no noise
Ability to start small
Cost savings
Environmental-less pollution

Michael noted that the cost of solar energy is coming down dramatically. He indicated that many places start with smaller installations as significant acreage is required for larger solar installations. He indicated that Marquette is in the process of installing 128 megawatts of solar power and Escanaba has put in some solar panels near the airport. An audience member noted that they have installed solar panels for their home on Ridge Road that is paying for itself. Michael noted that many power companies will give rebates for power you share with them. Excess generation can be put back into the system to generate credits from the power company.

Michael noted potential savings the Township might have if panels were added to the Township offices. He indicated that roof top installations typically are under warranty for 25 years. Christine asked if there were often roof issues after installation. Michael indicated that these issues were not common unless the roof was older. Michael noted that ground mounted systems are feasible, but could create zoning issues. Questions about snow fall were asked. He noted that snow commonly falls quickly from panels,

but it may be a good idea to mount them higher to avoid problems with buildup on the ground. Lou indicated that the rest area just west of Seney is solely powered by solar energy and there have not been problems with it there.

Jeff indicated that in mid-Michigan, farming areas are being purchased by utility companies to install solar panels. This has generated community debate as many are concerned about the loss of farm land and other renewable resources (e.g. lumber).

Michael presented information on some communities that are using marginalized land, such as former landfill areas to install solar panels, often in partnership with utility companies. An audience member asked who typically maintains community panels. Michael indicated that it varies, but his company does offer maintenance services, including monitoring plant growth.

Lou questioned if the State is open to leasing State land for commercial solar projects.

Questions were asked about the feasibility of installing a system to be used for Woodland Park. If at ground level, there may be issues in keeping it protected. The possibility of panels on the pole barn adjacent to the community center and Woodland Park might be something to consider. Michael indicated his company will do initial feasibility studies. The Township Clerk asked about grant opportunities. Michael indicated they are limited, but that there are some good tax breaks for individuals who put systems in for their homes.

Jeff asked about recycling of decommissioned panels. Michael indicated the Dept. of Energy is pushing for more options, but currently there are few local options for disposal. Repurposing is not happening much yet.

Michael noted some “dual use” options that some areas have developed such as using solar panels for parking canopies and using paneled areas for grazing animals.

Michael suggested that as the Township works on the master plan some items to consider/encourage might include:

- Encourage construction of energy efficient buildings
- Encourage development of clean energy systems
- Consider zoning issues that may develop
- Develop commitments, resolutions & subcommittees
- Development of strategic plans
- Capital improvement plans

Michael indicated that the MSU Extension office can provide some assistance as do some of the power companies.

An audience member suggested that charging stations for electric cars may be needed soon. Discussion ensued regarding this being a community project or a business opportunity for individuals. The

possibility of putting some charging stations near Woodland Park that could be accessed for a fee might be something to consider. It was suggested that Alger Delta be asked about level 2 chargers.

Larry thanked Michael for his presentation.

OTHER: Larry asked the Planning Commission members to start thinking about what they envision in the Master Plan and indicated we need to schedule meetings in the near future to begin developing the plan. Larry reminded the Commission about the public hearing related to the Hammersly campsite request scheduled for July 28 at 7:00pm.

PUBLIC COMMENT: There was no additional public comment.

ADJOURNMENT: The meeting was adjourned on a motion by Lou with support by Nancy.