

November 16, 2023

A Special Meeting of the McCook County Commission was called to order in the Court Room by Chairman Marc Dick. Members present: Dean Koch, Steve Gordon, and Charles Liesinger. Absent: Chuck Mehlbrech.

Chairman Dick led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chairman Dick called for approval of the agenda. Motion Koch to approve the agenda as posted. Second Gordon. Motion carried.

Public comment: Roger Hofer provided a copy of a letter to the editor to each Commission member.

Conflict of Interest: none.

Motion Liesinger to convene as Board of Adjustment. Second Gordon. Motion carried.

At 9:00 a.m. the Board of Adjustment held a public hearing to receive input concerning a request for a conditional use. Applicant: Grant Solar, LLC. Reason: Solar Energy Generating System 99 Mega Watts. Legal descriptions: W2NW4 Excluding N509' of W856', Section 13, Grant Twp; NE4 Section 14 Grant Twp; SE4 Section 14 Grant Twp; SW4 Section 14 Excluding Lot H2 Section 14, Grant Twp; SE4 Section 15 Grant Twp; and N2NE4 Excluding Tract 1 Sperling's Addition & Excluding H1 Section 23 Grant Twp.

Chair Dick welcomed everyone, noting that the Board of Adjustment is meeting today to hear the conditional use permit of Grant Solar LLC for the purpose of constructing a commercial solar energy conversion system of up to 99 MW. Chair Dick turned the hearing over to Zoning Administrator Kaufmann to explain the meeting procedures.

Cori Kaufmann, Zoning Administrator, welcomed everyone and asked that everyone please sign in. Kaufmann explained the meeting procedures noting that the applicant would provide their presentation first, public comments would be taken, the applicant will then be given time to address questions/concerns that came from the public comment, and then the board will discuss the application and their findings. Anna Flogstad, Staff Appraiser, Angie McCormick, P&Z /Clerk, and Sean Hegyi, Secog Transportation/Land Use Planner, were also present.

Mollie Smith, Fredrikson & Byron PA, explained how this request for a conditional use fits the County zoning regulations. Marc Morandi- we are farmer friendly & community friendly. A map of the proposed site including an operations building & substation was presented for review and it was noted that the project is 98% vegetative. Kip Krueger- talked about benefits to landowners & future Ag use, annual charitable donation, and community economic benefits. There will be 130 temp jobs during the construction period. \$12.2 million tax revenue over 25 years. Why in McCook County? Need transmission interconnection, competitive solar resource on usable land, landowner partners, and electrical demand. Marc Morandi- management plan includes added vegetation, possible to have sheep grazing on project site, will provide equipment for emergency response, heat island isn't associated with solar facilities. Mollie Smith- this project is consistent with the County's Comprehensive Plan, is authorized in the Zoning Regulations, and meets County requirements. Smith noted that a packet containing letters of support was also provided for the Commission.

At this time, Chairman Dick opened the public hearing for public comment.

Delia Druley, Evans, Haigh & Arndt, informed the Board that she is representing landowners of the project because of aggressive neighbors, adding that if not approved, landowner rights are being taken away. This project does follow zoning regulations and offers the opportunity for economic development. Jacob Anderson- believe project benefits include more water infiltration, homes for local wildlife, soil health, decreased erosion, and plant growth. Ray Townsend- I grew up in Canistota area and believe this project is great opportunity for economic development. It follows the zoning regulations and gives landowners a choice. Danya Buseman- our property is SE of this proposed project, 730 acres of farm ground will be taken out of production, our community is farm minded and solar doesn't fit, and the Comprehensive Plan promotes an appropriate location. David (DJ) Buseman- solar project doesn't fit our community, have concerns about glare, drainage, panel radiation, and property values falling. How can we trust what we're being told? I was approached

during silage cutting. Joel Buseman- heard about 30” tile from Paul Kostboth and have concerns about drainage. Poor communicators. What happens with a hailstorm, this is not a commonsense project for this area. Jerrilyn Hofer Samberg- sent questions to NGR on October 23rd. My acres will be exposed to heat island effect and drainage issues. County needs insurance information. No integrity. James Baier- America has food shortage, why take farm ground out of production? Put panels on your own homes. Chuck Eide (on behalf of family)- we are looked at as an enemy and our landowner rights are being deprived. Casey Puetz- along a State Hwy is not a good location, there are better places especially with possibility of a fire. Steve Richarz- question for landowners-what’s important, food, or Biden’s unrealistic plan? Ferlyn Hofer- heat that project could put out, along with existing heat, will kill more crops and I have drainage concerns with fencing being used. Phil Hofer- also concerned about the heat, Ag production and generation farms will be hurt. DeeAnn Matthaei- agree with those opposing the solar project, lack of communication, biggest concern now is a fire, and afraid of accidents due to panels tilting. Andy Tieszen- concerned about taxes and fraud, does Assessor set value, and if a fire does start, you can’t just let it burn. Jeremy Larson- will more projects like this come along. Brad Engbarth- how will this affect the county, will bonds cover what’s left behind if a natural disaster hit or a fire?

With no further comments, Chairman Dick closed public comment portion of the hearing. Grant Solar LLC representatives were allowed time to answer questions that were brought up during the Public Comments.

Mike MaRous, Appraiser, noted that he has completed comparisons of demographics and economics and has not seen any tax appeals. Comm Dick asked Maruse if he’d seen any building going on near existing sites. Yes. John Bloom addressed emergency response. With concerns noted, make sure se increase fire breaks and may need to increase mowing or spot spraying for weed management. Marc Morandi addressed the what ifs of disasters noting that a decommissioning plan will be put in place and at this time \$7.3 million are in a bond. Michael Morris addressed the concerns of panels. The panels are covered with an anti-glare product, there is not a noticeable heat island effect, and there is no radiation produced, so not a risk. Comm Koch asked National Grid representatives if any of them have read an article by George Franklin which suggests panels to be 20% efficient and stated that they will draw tornados and electrical storms. Not familiar with this article. Kip Krueger noted that there will be no fencing over drainage areas. Jay Hesse addressed energy cost. This project is in development stage and not final so energy cost cannot be determined. Comm Koch asked if current site is limited at 99 MW. Jay Hesse stated that the site is determined by interconnection availability. Comm Dick asked how a County Commission can regulate what it doesn’t know? Jay Hesse- project does support rural living and generation farmers. Liability insurance will be in place to cover the project. Limited resources in ability to expand and federal tax incentives are available. Comm Koch- input from neighbors says communication has been bad, did NGR listen? Jay Hesse- we try to make contact and talk with neighbors. Comm Koch- letters in favor of the proposed project reference an increase in property taxes but it’s not a property tax. Jay Hesse noted that the land is still Ag and State laws dictate other tax dollars. Joe Ibrahim, Engineer, said there is no concrete in the ground except for where a building will be erected, steel trackers will be pulled from the ground, panels don’t shatter, and he doesn’t see a lot of grading being needed. John Bloom- there are 41 farms in other States, there is no heat island effect, the trackers angle the solar panels for minimal damage, the sites are monitored 24/7, and we don’t expect a fire department to fight electrical fires. Comm Koch asked about security if drainage areas are not fenced. Joe Ibrahim, Engineer, noted that fence options will be looked at. Mollie Smith (as wrap up) there are many agencies over-seeing this project and agreements are in place. Comm Dick asked if electricity is monitored. Mollie Smith, yes. Joe Ibrahim added that this project will interconnect with Xcel Substation. Mollie Smith informed Chairman Dick that they were finished.

Chairman Dick closed the public hearing, and a ten-minute recess was taken.

Chairman Dick read 17.01 Conditional Use Permits, referencing why the meeting was held today, the purpose of the meeting, and discussion points. Chair Dick added that we are missing a board member today and one needs to leave now. The Board of Adjustment received more information today and needs time to review it and several board members plan on visiting existing solar farm sites. With that, Chairman Dick asked for a motion to postpone the hearing today allowing time for further review of information. Motion Koch to postpone this conditional use hearing to Tuesday, December 19, 2023, at 9:00 a.m. Second Gordon. Roll call vote: Koch, Gordon, Liesinger, and Dick. Absent: Mehlbrech. Motion carried. This hearing will be continued in the Court Room on the 3rd floor of the Courthouse.

The meeting adjourned subject to call.

Dated this 16th day of November 2023.

Marc Dick _____
Chairman, McCook County Commission

ATTEST:
Geraldyn Sherman _____
Auditor, McCook County