

STAFF REPORT FOR A SPECIAL USE

McLean County Department of Building and Zoning

CASE NUMBER SU-18-11

1. REFERENCE:

- a. Hearing date: August 7, 2018
- b. Applicant's name and address: Heyworth Solar, LLC by Geronimo Energy, 7650 Edinborough Way Suite 725, Edina, MN 55435
- c. Land owner's name and address: AFC Illinois LLC, 4600 S. Syracuse Street Ste. 1450, Denver, CO 80237

2. LOCATION AND CURRENT/PROPOSED ZONING AND LAND USE:

- a. Property location: Immediately southwest of the intersection of 50 North Road and 700 East Road (County Highway 45)
- b. Township: Funks Grove Township
- c. Parcel Number: 34-07-400-004
- d. Existing zoning: A-Agriculture District
- e. Applicant request: For a special use to allow a Solar Power Generating Facility in the Agriculture District
- f. Existing land use: Crop production

3. DIMENSIONS:

- a. Size of Parcel: 77 acres
- b. Road Frontage: Approximately 1,300 feet on the south side of 50 North Road and approximately 2,200 feet on the west side of 700 East Road

4. EXISTING LAND FEATURES:

- a. Topography: Relatively flat
- b. Drainage: To the south
- c. Vegetation: Crop production
- d. Public Road: 700 East Road is oil and chip 21 feet in width, 50 North Road is oil and chip 15 feet in width

5. SURROUNDING ZONING: Agriculture District on all sides

6. SURROUNDING LAND USE:

- a. North: Crop production and a farm dwelling
- b. South: Crop production and single family dwelling
- c. East: Crop production and a single family dwelling
- d. West: Crop production

7. LAND EVALUATION SITE ASSESSMENT (LESA) REPORT:

McLean County Soil and Water Conservation District staff report on soil for subject site:

- a. Soils -- Score of **94.9** points out of a maximum possible evaluation score of **100** points.

McLean County Building and Zoning Department staff report on site assessment for the subject site:

- b. Site Assessment -- Score of **167** points out of a maximum possible evaluation score of

200 points.

- c. Total LESA review score is **261.9 points** out of a maximum of **300** points.

EVALUATION RESULT:

The LESA Report indicates that a total score of **230 points and above** means that the property is of **high** value for agricultural land protection.

- 8. STAFF ANALYSIS:** The analysis of the seven standards listed in Article VIII Section 350-56 of the McLean County Code (Standards for Special Use Permits) as they apply to this zoning request is as follows:

- a. **The proposed special use will not be detrimental to or endanger the health, safety, morals, comfort, or welfare of the public.** This standard is met. The applicant proposes to establish a 4-megawatt solar power generating facility on this property which will meet all of the County setback requirements and use standards for a solar power generating facility.

The application indicates that this facility will contain rows of Photovoltaic (PV) cell panels mounted on posts set in the ground. These rows of panels will be mounted in one of two ways: on a fixed-tilt or on a linear axis tracking system, which allows them to follow the sun throughout the day. After site specifics and design components are more fully developed for this solar farm, the applicant will determine which system is more appropriate for this site. The solar panels will be constructed of dark, light-absorbing materials, will be designed with an anti-reflective coating and will be a maximum of 15 feet in height.

The applicant submitted an EcoCAT communication from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources which indicates that there is no record of State-listed threatened or endangered species, Illinois Natural Area Inventory sites, dedicated Illinois Nature Preserves or registered Land and Water Reserves in the vicinity of the project location, and that the consultation is terminated.

A decommissioning plan that includes an Agricultural Impact Mitigation Agreement with the Illinois Department of Agriculture and financial assurance acceptable to the County need to be provided.

A contact person for the applicant will need to be kept on file with the Department of Building and Zoning for issues/complaints upon completion of the facility.

There has been no communication submitted from the Illinois Historical Preservation Agency (IHPA).

- b. **The proposed special use will not be injurious to the use and enjoyment of other property in the immediate vicinity for purposes already permitted or substantially diminish property values in the immediate area.** This standard is met. Nearby property that is currently in crop production will continue to be desirable for such use. Ground cover that encourages pollination, recommended by the McLean County Soil and Water Conservation District, will need to be installed.
- c. **The proposed special use will not impede the orderly development of the surrounding property for uses permitted in the district.** This standard is met.

Nearby property that is currently in crop production or used as residences will continue to be desirable for such uses.

- d. **Adequate utilities, access roads, drainage and/or other necessary facilities have been or will be provided.** This standard is met. The property has approximately 1,300 feet of frontage on the south side of 50 North Road and approximately 1,920 feet of frontage on the west side of 700 East Road. The Mount Hope-Funks Grove Fire Protection District will provide fire protection for the subject property. Pre-development drainage patterns will be retained as much as possible. The applicant will provide certified plans for storm water detention/retention before a permit is issued for the proposed solar power generating facility. The applicant will need to have all field tile damaged in the construction process repaired by a competent contractor, with experience in such repair, during the life of the solar farm.
- e. **Adequate measures have been or will be taken to provide ingress and egress so designed as to minimize traffic congestion in the public streets.** This standard is met. It appears that safe site distance can be provided at the proposed entrance. The applicant has been working with the County Engineer on a road use agreement, and will need to obtain an entrance permit from the County before a construction permit will be issued for the proposed solar farm.
- f. **The establishment, maintenance and operation of the special use will be in conformance with the intent of the district in which the special use is proposed to be located.** This standard is met. The preamble states “Provide for the location and govern the establishment and operation of land uses which are compatible with agriculture and are such a nature that their location away from residential, commercial and industrial areas is most desirable”.
- g. **The proposed special use, in all other respects, conforms to the applicable regulations of the district in which it is located.** This standard is met. According to the Zoning Ordinance, “The Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) System has been designed to provide a rational process for assisting local officials in making farmland conversion decisions through the local zoning process.” Although this property has a high LESA score, the applicant indicates that native grasses will be grown and maintained on the site and will provide forage for pollinators. After the subject property is returned to its original condition, as required by the Zoning Ordinance, the land can be returned to crop production. It was reported that up to 35% of corn grown in McLean County is used to make ethanol to be mixed with gasoline and used for fuel. Harvesting the sun to produce electricity in the Agriculture District with solar farms is similar, and another way for farmers to produce value from their land in addition to producing corn and soybean crops.

9. CONCLUDING OPINION: Staff recommends that this application meets all of the standards set forth in Article VIII Section 350-56 (Standards for Special Use Permits), provided the following stipulations:

- 1) An entrance permit shall be obtained from the McLean County Engineer before a construction permit is issued.

- 2) The applicant shall provide certified plans for storm water detention/retention before a construction permit is issued;
- 3) The applicant shall complete consultation with the Illinois Historical Preservation Agency (IHPA) before a construction permit is issued.
- 4) The applicant shall have all field tile damaged in the construction process repaired by a competent contractor, with experience in such repair, during the life of the solar farm.
- 5) The solar panels shall be installed with an anti-reflective coating.
- 6) Groundcover that encourages pollination that is recommended by the McLean County Soil and Water Conservation District needs to be installed.
- 7) A contact person for the applicant will need to be kept on file with the Department of Building and Zoning for issues/complaints upon completion of the facility.
- 8) As a condition of receiving a permit from the County, the company must pay the cost of hiring an Illinois registered professional engineer to provide a certified estimate of decommissioning costs. The company shall provide decommissioning security financing for the estimated cost of decommissioning in the amount determined by the engineer or \$25,000, whichever is greater. Security financing must be in the form of an irrevocable letter of credit or a cash escrow, unless the County Board, in its sole discretion, agrees to accept a performance bond. The decommissioning cost estimate will be reviewed and revised when needed, but estimate review must occur at least every ten years.
- 9) The company must provide an Agricultural Impact Mitigation Agreement signed by the company and the Illinois Department of Agriculture prior to the issuance of a permit to construct from the County, and must certify that it will comply with all of the terms of the Agreement. Nothing in the Agricultural Impact Mitigation Agreement will preclude the County from establishing any standards that exceed those contained in the Agreement.
- 10) Development shall follow the plans and documents submitted with the application and with Zoning Regulations including Article VI Section 350-43.OO (3) (Use Standards for a solar power generating facility).

Respectfully submitted,

Philip Dick, AICP, Director

X:\StaffReports\Sr2018\SU-18-11-Heyworth Solar