

STAFF REPORT FOR A SPECIAL USE

McLean County Department of Building and Zoning

CASE NUMBER SU-18-30

1. REFERENCE:

- a. Hearing date: January 2, 2019
- b. Applicant's name and address: ASD McLean IL Solar VI, LLC by Amp Solar Development, Inc., 55a Port St E, Port Credit, ON
- c. Land owner's name and address: Shirley Carr, 124 Boulder Dr., Gridley, IL 61744

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

- a. Property location: Immediately northeast of the intersection of 3000 North Road and 2025 East Road – County Highway 29
- b. Township: Gridley Township
- c. Parcel Number: 02-09-400-002
- 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: 27 acres
- b. Road Frontage: Approximately 1,320 feet on the east side of 2025 East Road – County Highway 29 and approximately 1,320 feet on the north side of 3000 North Road

4. EXISTING LAND FEATURES:

- a. Topography: Relatively flat
- b. Drainage: To the north
- c. Vegetation: Crop production
- d. Public Road: 2025 East Road – County Highway 29 is an asphalt road 22.1 feet in width; and 3000 North Road is oil and chip 21.5 feet in width

5. SURROUNDING ZONING: A-Agriculture District on all sides

6. SURROUNDING LAND USE:

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

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 **98.1** 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 **168** points out of a maximum possible evaluation score of **200** points.
- c. Total LESA review score is **266.1 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 **very 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:

- 1. 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 two co-located 2-megawatt solar power generating facilities 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 are referred to as “solar arrays”. Amp Solar Development will mount the solar arrays on a tracking system, which allows them to follow the sun throughout the day. The solar arrays will be designed with an anti-reflective coating. The applicant indicates the solar arrays will be a maximum 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.

The application indicates that they will provide a contact person to be kept on file with the Department of Building and Zoning for issues/complaints upon completion of the facility.

The application indicates that a one-mile search from the site was conducted using the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency Geographic Information System. Two historic sites were found within one mile of the site, both are in the Village of Gridley and more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile from the subject property.

- 2. 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. A single-family residence located across the road to the west of the proposed solar farm will not likely be negatively impacted. The electrical transformers for the facility, the part of the facility that creates a humming noise, will be located approximately 1,100 feet from the residence and would not likely heard by the

residents. Nearby property in residential use will continue to be desirable for such use, and nearby land in crop production will continue to be desirable for such use. Ground cover that includes native species, encourages pollination, recommended by the McLean County Soil and Water Conservation District, will need to be installed.

3. **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 in residential use will continue to be desirable for such use, and nearby land in crop production will continue to be desirable for such use.
4. **Adequate utilities, access roads, drainage and/or other necessary facilities have been or will be provided.** This standard is met. The property has approximately 1,320 feet of frontage on the east side of 2025 East Road – County Highway 29 and approximately 1,320 feet on the north side of 3000 North Road. The Gridley Township 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. The applicant has obtained a signoff from the County Health Department.
5. **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 to 2025 East Road - County Highway 29. The applicant has been in communication with the County Engineer and will need to obtain an entrance permit from him before a construction permit will be issued for the proposed solar farm.
6. **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”.
7. **The proposed special use, in all other respects, conforms to the applicable regulations of the Agriculture District.** 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 a landscape plan will include a non-invasive ground cover that is suitable for the local environment, supportive of pollinators, and will reduce the dependence of mowing and spraying for weeds/invasive species. 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 was used to make ethanol. Harvesting the sun to produce electricity in the Agriculture District with solar farms is similar, and another way to produce significant value from farmland 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 compliance with the following stipulations:
- 1) An entrance permit shall be obtained from the 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) 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

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