

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF THE TOWNSHIP OF CAMBRIDGE
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PUBLIC HEARING

OCTOBER 11, 2021

CALL TO ORDER, MOMENT OF SILENCE, AND SALUTE TO THE FLAG: Chairman Cole called the October 11, 2021, Public Hearing of the Board of Supervisors to order at 6:00 PM in the Municipal Building followed by a moment of silence and the salute to the flag.

ROLL CALL: Supervisors in attendance were Kevin Cole, Charlie Bauer and Bernie Blystone. Also present was Secretary/Treasurer/Zoning Officer, Debra E. Merritt; Stenographer, Sharla Polach; Residents, Amy and Robert Bjork, Connie and Ben Bullock, Matthew DeFrances, Perry Hilburn, Tom and Dulcie Anderson and Linda Douthett; and Visitors, Lindsey White and Zach Norwood.

IDENTIFICATION OF RECORDING DEVICES. There were no recording devices identified.

INTRODUCTION OF SHARLA POLACH, COURT REPORTER. Mr. Cole introduced Sharla Polach, Court Reporter who took the official transcript of the hearing. Mr. Cole noted that all testimony given would be under oath. Ms. Polach administered the oath to all in attendance.

CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT OF REASON FOR HEARING. Mr. Cole stated that the Board of Supervisors of Cambridge Township are holding this Public Hearing to inform and obtain public comments on proposed Ordinance No. 01 of 2021, an Ordinance amending the 2016 Cambridge Township Zoning Ordinance to provide regulations for solar energy systems. The Public Hearing Notice was duly advertised in the *Meadville Tribune*, on Monday, September 27, 2021 and Monday, October 4, 2021, as well as posted at the Municipal Building and on the Cambridge Township website.

SUPERVISORS' COMMENTS: There were no comments from the Board of Supervisors at this time.

PUBLIC COMMENTS: Ben Bullock began by presenting the Board with a letter from him and his wife Connie, suggesting changes to the proposed Ordinance. Mr. and Mrs. Bullock stated that they would request that screening adjacent to occupied residential buildings must include native plants or shrubs and should extend at least 50' on either side of the residential building that faces the project. They indicated that they are opposed to any fencing option that is available to the developer under the current Ordinance. Mr. and Mrs. Bullock would also request that gravel roads be improved and paved prior to the start of the project and be maintained at the PSES owner's expense throughout the life of the project.

Perry Hilburn stated that he would rather see the solar project and the panels, rather than some plants and shrubs that may or may not stay alive or become overgrown after a period of time. To provide clarification to the residents Ms. Merritt read the Screening, Vegetation and Ground Cover section of the proposed Ordinance, noting that the options for road screening and screening from adjoining residential parcels differ. She did note that if the developer opted to use native plantings or shrubs, then they must be properly maintained and replaced when necessary, in order to create a continual visual barrier.

Matthew DeFrances stated that he believed that it was important to protect and retain the existing prime agricultural lands in the Township. He further stated that he would request that the setbacks from an existing residential dwelling be increased from the currently proposed 150' and believed that a setback of 500' would provide for a better boundary.

Dulcie Anderson stated that she believed that the required screening should be as high as the maximum height of the solar panels. She stated that a screening of 8' would not block the visual effects

of the solar panels that can be as high as 18' pursuant to the Ordinance. Tom Anderson stated that he agreed that the screening height should be increased and that the setbacks along the road right-of-way should be increased as well, noting that the further back the project was located, the better it would look to adjacent property owners. With regard to ground cover, Mr. Anderson questioned why non-tracking solar arrays must 36" above the ground but tracking arrays do not. Ms. Merritt stated that it is the Board's understanding that since tracking solar arrays follow the sun, ground cover receives adequate sunlight throughout the day, whereas fixed arrays remain in one location, thereby possibility blocking sunlight which would prohibit growth of the ground cover.

Mr. Cole stated that the Board has struggled with the screening and setback regulations, as it is the Board's intent to protect neighboring property owners' interests, while ensuring that the Ordinance is not too restrictive on developers.

Matthew DeFrances stated that he and his family enjoy living in Township and want to continue to do so, however is afraid that a solar energy project of this magnitude will not only dramatically change the landscape of the Township, but also affect the value of his property.

Mr. Bauer noted that currently the Township does not have any provisions regulating solar energy systems in their existing Zoning Ordinance, which is the reason for this zoning amendment. He felt that the Board is acting in their residents' best interests by enacting these regulations in order to provide reasonable protections for property owners affected by such a project.

Mr. Cole stated that upon hearing the residents' concerns, he would be open to increasing the setbacks from existing residential dwellings, as well as the setbacks from the road rights-of-way. Ms. Merritt stated that currently the proposed setback from an existing residential dwelling is 150' or 50' from any adjoining parcel with an existing residential dwelling, and the PSES perimeter fence is required to comply with the building setback requirements of the applicable zoning district, noting that the setback is 50' along the road right-of-way in the agricultural district. Mr. Cole stated that he would support an increase in the residential setback to 200' and road right-of-way set back to 100'. Mr. Bauer stated that he would rather see the residential setback increased to 225' and the road right-of-way setback to 75'. The Board agreed that would be a reasonable compromise. Ms. Merritt confirmed it was the Board's intent to amend the setback portion of the Ordinance so that solar panels of a PSES shall not be located within 225 feet of any existing residential dwelling, or 50 feet from any adjoining parcel with an existing residential dwelling; and the PSES perimeter fence shall comply with the building setbacks of the applicable zoning district, except when abutting a public road right-of-way which then shall comply with a building setback of 75 feet. The Board stated that was correct.

Mr. Cole made a motion to increase the setback from an existing residential dwelling to 225 feet, or 50 feet from any adjoining parcel with an existing residential dwelling and require the PSES perimeter fence comply with the building setbacks of the applicable zoning district, except when abutting a public road right-of-way which then shall comply with a building setback of 75 feet. Second by Mr. Bauer.

Cole: Yes

Bauer: Yes

Blystone: Yes

Mr. Bullock again questioned whether the Board would consider requiring the developer to improve the existing roads, specifically requiring dirt roads to be paved. Mr. Cole stated that he did not feel that the Township should require the developer to pave a gravel road, however noted that the Ordinance does require that during the construction phase the owner/developer must provide the Township with a road bond in accordance with the Township's existing posting and bonding Ordinance, to ensure that any damage done to the roadways is covered by the developer.

Mr. Cole asked if there were any further questions or comments. There were no other statements offered by the public.

CLOSING REMARKS BY THE SUPERVISORS. There were no closing remarks offered by the Supervisors.

ADJOURNMENT: There being no further business, Mr. Cole moved to adjourn. Second by Mr. Bauer. All were in favor and the meeting was adjourned at 6:48 PM.


Debra E. Merritt, Secretary