GRANT COUNTY
PLANNING COMMISSION

Chairman: Bill Bailey
Vice Chairman: Blair Fuglie
Board Members: Carol Dawson, Terry Dorsing, Ann Drader and Scott Lybbert
Secretary: Doris Long

COMMISSIONERS’ HEARING ROOM - GRANT COUNTY COURTHOUSE, EPHRATA, WASHINGTON

JANUARY 19, 2022 @ 7:00 P.M.

2022 Attendance

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P=Present  A=Absent  C=Canceled  NM=No Meeting Held

Chairman, Bill Bailey, opens the meeting at 7:00 p.m.

Workshop to discuss future Development Standards for solar and wind generation facilities.

Mr. Bailey explains how the workshop will proceed.

Development Services Director, Damien Hooper, leads the workshop and presents the information. There are seven members of the public in attendance, who may participate in the discussion, one in person and six attending via WebEx.

Mr. Hooper explains the original proposed Code changes were annotated with the main points of the Planning Commission’s comments from the December workshop. For this workshop they will focus only on those particular sections. He begins with Chapter 23.08.357, Performance and Use Standards.

Mr. Hooper reads:
23.08.357 Solar Energy Facility
A. Solar Energy Facilities shall not be allowed on any parcel where irrigated agricultural activities were present prior to the effective date of this code provision (insert effective date).

Comment: “Solar Energy Facilities shall not be allowed on any parcel where irrigated agricultural activities were present prior to the effective date of this code (insert date) and the NRCS soil classification for irrigated conditions is class 1 through 4.” (editorial: this would allow the conversion of class 5 through 7 ground)
There is a great deal of discussion as to how to apply regulations to irrigated lands. What criteria would be used to define irrigated land? Should it be decided solely on the irrigation factor, or should it be decided by the best use of the land? Should the landowner be able to decide how the land should be used? Should soil classifications be considered at all? One section of land can consist of several different soil classifications. The soil may be considered as poor quality, but still support a vineyard. One option may be to identify irrigated ground as using USBR water through the three Irrigation Districts. A second could be any lands that haven’t been irrigated in a set number of years.
Mr. Hooper reminds the Planning Commission that lands zoned Agriculture are prohibited. In the 2018 Comprehensive Plan update, ag ground was established as the Agricultural Zone and the remaining ground was zoned as Rural Resource. What is currently being considered are the Rural Resource zoned lands that are irrigated in some way.

Mr. Bailey moves on to section B.

B. Solar Energy Facilities shall not be allowed on sites or portions of sites with an existing native grade greater than 5-percent. Each solar energy facility submitted for permit consideration shall include a full topographic survey of the site with 2-foot contour intervals. The topographic survey shall delineate all portions of the site greater than 5-percent slope.
Comment: PC Suggested 10%
After a short discussion the Planning Commission members agree that the original proposed 5-percent slope is acceptable.

Kim Foster, with the ASPI Group, reports to the Planning Commission that they have been working on this for two years. Last year during the Comprehensive Plan cycle they submitted an application suggesting the establishment of a solar overlay zone, which would allow permitting through the Conditional Use Permit process. He explains their view on how this process would work and asks that the Planning Commission to review the material that had been submitted.
There is a brief discussion during which Mr. Hooper explains that the Board of County Commissioners chose not to move the Comp Plan Amendment submittal forward.

The discussion continues regarding applying regulations to irrigated lands using soil classification and grade as criteria. One public comment made is that what is being proposed is so restrictive that it is starting to undercut a lot of development opportunities.

Mr. Hooper reviews:
D. Setbacks for solar energy facilities shall comply with the standard setbacks of the underlying zoning classification. Additionally, in no case shall any component of a solar energy facility be constructed within 500 yards of any off-site residence.
Comment: This does not affect the siting of a home adjacent to a solar energy facility, if someone choses to build next to a solar facility, that would be their own choice.
E. Solar Energy Facilities shall incorporate glare reducing materials. In all instances, no fugitive glare shall be permitted to emit onto adjacent properties and/or rights-of-way.
Comment: Solar energy facilities shall be required to incorporate and maintain anti-reflective coatings on all solar panels to reduce fugitive glare.

Mr. Bailey suggests that instead of Damien reading each amended Code section that they work through the concerns that the Planning Commission may have.

There is discussion relating to the protection of wildlife and vegetation, and how the Department of Fish and Wildlife would be involved.
H (2). Decommissioning/reclamation shall commence within twelve (12) months after power production has permanently ceased and be completed within twelve (12) months from the start date of the decommissioning/reclamation work. Additionally, in the event power production ceases for a period of 12 consecutive months at any time during the life of the facility, the site shall be deemed abandoned and the provisions for decommissioning shall be available to Grant County.  
Comment: PC recommends 24 months to complete the decommissioning (editorial: Staff would prefer to simply revise this to require that full decommissioning activities be completed within 3 years of the date that power production has ceased.)  
Regarding Section H, Mr. Bailey asks if Staff had looked at the DNR reclamation criteria for gravel pits and would that be of any help.  
Mr. Hooper replies he remembered talking about it, but he didn’t look at it. He will research it for the next workshop.  
The Planning Commission agrees that the recommended 3 years is a good and acceptable number for decommissioning.  

(8)vi. Grant County, at its sole discretion, may also approve modified terms and timing of the bond amounts based on the lifecycle stage of the solar energy facility.  
I. Damaged and Repair: Any Solar Energy Facility that is damaged by the elements or vandalism shall be required to submit applicable building permit applications (if any required) within one year of the date the damage was first observed. Damage and repair do not qualify as decommissioned or abandoned unless the duration of the cessation of power production meets the requirements of GCC 23.08.357(H) above.  
There is discussion regarding the County’s extensive involvement in the decommissioning process.  

General discussion takes place including the overlay concept, and the probability of using Industrial Zoned lands for solar facilities.  
Mr. Bailey requests to have mapping prepared demonstrating what lands are located in the USBR project, the Rural Remote Zone and the Rural Resource Zone.  
The Planning Commission would also like to receive the ASPI documents to review before the next workshop.  

The next workshop is set to be held on February 9th.  

Board Action:  
Approval of the December 1, 2021 Planning Commission Meeting minutes.  
Mr. Lybbert moves to approve the meeting minutes as presented.  
Mr. Dorsing second the motion.  
ACTION: Scott Lybbert moves to approve the meeting minutes as presented. Terry Dorsing seconds the motion. Voted on and passes unanimously.  

Workshop adjourned at 9:09 PM.  

Respectfully submitted:  

Doris Long, Secretary  

Approved by:  

Bill Bailey, Chairman