



## REDWOOD COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL OFFICE

**Planning & Zoning • Parks & Trails • GIS  
Aquatic Invasive Species • Septic Inspector  
Drainage Inspector • Agricultural Inspector**

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### REDWOOD COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

#### *MINUTES*

**Meeting Date: December 28, 2020**

A meeting of the Redwood County Planning Commission convened on Monday, the 28<sup>th</sup> day of December, 2020, at the Redwood County Government Center.

The following members of the Redwood County Planning Commission were present: Mike Scheffler, Mark Madsen, Mike Kaufenberg, Jeff Huseby, DeVonna Zeug, and Commissioner Dave Forkrud. Also present were the following individuals: Scott Tempel, Redwood County Engineer Anthony Sellner, and Land Use & Zoning Supervisor Nick Brozek.

At 1:00 p.m. the regularly scheduled December 28<sup>th</sup>, 2020 Redwood County Planning Commission meeting was called to order by Chair Scheffler.

Chair Scheffler then directed Brozek to read the Planning Commission rules and procedures. Printed copies were available to the public.

At 1:05 p.m. Chair Scheffler called to order a public hearing on Conditional Use Permit Application #10-20, submitted by Scott Tempel.

Prior to the Planning Commission meeting, the Planning Commission members were provided an informational packet, which included the following information regarding the matter:

1. Scott Tempel of Novel Energy Solutions is requesting to construct a community solar garden on an agricultural property located on County Hwy 7, about 3 miles north of the City of Belview. The property is owned by Paul & Kimberly Milbradt. Paul Milbradt signed off on the Conditional Use Permit application. The land will be leased from the landowner. The project will be owned by Novel Milbradt Solar LLC.
2. The proposed site is located on the east side of County Hwy 7, on the south edge of the Northwest Quarter of Section 29, Swedes Forest Township, parcel number 68-029-2020. The site is in the Agriculture District.
3. The facility will consist of a one (1) megawatt solar array, on approximately 8 acres, that will be connected directly to the power grid for the benefit of subscribers to the solar garden. Subscribers will save on their energy bills over the 25-year term of the interconnection agreement with Xcel Energy.
4. Equipment to be installed includes 3,780 solar panels, inverters, transformers, utility poles, and single-axis tracker racking installed on piles. The maximum height will be about 14'.

5. A 6' tall chain link perimeter fence, topped with three strands of barbed wire, will surround the site. The gate will be locked and accessible to Xcel Energy and emergency response personnel. A single light will be maintained at the point of interconnection, to be illuminated continually in evening hours for personnel safety.
6. Applicant is willing to provide screening on the west side (road side) of the site, consisting of trees to screen from the right-of-way.
7. A 15' wide access road will be constructed to serve the site from County Hwy 7. A temporary parking and loading area will be provided during the construction phase.
8. The ground underneath and between the solar panels will be seeded with a low maintenance grass seed mix and native grasses and pollinator plantings. The owner will control for noxious weeds during the life of the project. Construction is scheduled for the spring of 2021 and is expected to take 5 weeks.
9. There is no county drain tile or open ditch located on or near the project site.
10. The three nearest rural dwellings to the proposed solar garden are as follows: (1) 41724 CSAH 7, about 1130 feet north of the site; (2) 41766 CSAH 7, about 1230 feet north of the site; and (3) 41956 CSAH 7, about 2100 feet north of the site. The Paul Milbradt residence is located 2690 feet northeast of the site.
11. This is the ninth solar garden application in Redwood County since 2015. Of the other eight, six are operational or under construction and two have expired permits which have not been renewed. One site is a 3 MW site and the other sites are 1 MW each, for a total of 9 MW currently permitted. The proposed project would raise the total permitted MW in the Xcel territory to 10 MW.
12. The applicant has submitted a decommissioning plan addressing the disposition of the facility when it reaches the end of its useful life. At that time, the system will be shut down and the panels, racking, poles, cables, posts, inverters, trans-formers, concrete pads, fencing, and access driveway will be removed and properly disposed of. The site will then be restored to its pre-installation status as an agricultural field.
13. A copy of the Conditional Use Permit application, maps, plans, and proposed permit conditions are enclosed.

Scott Tempel was present at the meeting to explain the project. He made the following statements to the Commission:

- Tempel works for Novel Energy.
- Novel Energy is a family-owned business, located in St. Paul, MN. It was formed by a farm family who found solar power helpful for their farm operation.
- Novel is "vertically integrated" – they do the permitting, construction, operation, and maintenance of their projects.
- They generally do not sell projects off to 3<sup>rd</sup> parties.
- This is a 1MW project – community solar garden.
- Will sell energy into the grid, on a subscription basis.
- Subscribers will include businesses and residential customers of Xcel Energy.
- The site will use buried electrical lines on the site, but the interconnection will be up to Xcel – it may be buried or overhead.

The Planning Commissioners asked the following questions:

- Was Novel contacted by Milbradt, or does Novel choose the project site?
- How much does 1MW power?

- The site is oriented east to west?
- The road borders the western side of the site only?
- Will trees be planted to screen the site?
- Is the site currently in CRP?
- Is it typical for these solar gardens to be long and skinny like this one?
- Will this site use tracking panels?
- How far is it to the nearest substation?
- Is Tempel ok with the proposed permit conditions?

Tempel gave the following responses to the Planning Commissioners questions:

- Novel needs to find sites that are near substations with capacity to handle the project, near a 3-phase power line, that can be permitted under local rules, and with willing landowners. These are the factors that lead Novel to one site over another.
- Novel needs to go to Xcel with a viable project. Xcel is the next step after Redwood County approval.
- A 400kW project powers a truck stop. This is 2.5 times bigger than that.
- The site runs east to west because it needs a southern exposure. Novel works with the landowner to choose a site on the landowner's property that works best for the landowner.
- The site is not in CRP.
- The site is bordered on the west by a public highway.
- Trees for screening the site from view are not on the plan, but can be planted if the Commission thinks it is needed. It would not take many trees to screen the narrow road frontage.
- The shape of the site depends on the property and the landowner's wishes. Novel prefers a square.
- Panel tracking technology has gone down in price and up in reliability, so it is much more common currently than in the past.
- The 3-phase power line leading to the substation is adjacent to the project site – this is what is important to the project (more so than proximity to the substation itself).
- The proposed conditions are fine.

Commissioner Forkrud stated that the project site is currently pasture land, and is not farmed.

Commissioner Huseby stated that the substation is about 1.5 to 2 miles away to the north of the site.

The commissioners discussed that screening is not necessary due to narrow road frontage, solar sites being low impact (visually), and the nearest residences being some distance away.

Chair Scheffler asked if anyone was present to speak in support of the project. No one came forward.

Chair Scheffler asked if anyone was present to speak in opposition to the project. No one came forward.

Redwood County Engineer, Anthony Sellner stated that he was present to discuss access to the highway. Novel will need to apply for and obtain a permit to construct its access road.

Tempel stated that he generally applies for the access permit before obtaining a building permit and beginning construction.

Chair Scheffler closed the public meeting at 1:16 p.m. He then directed Brozek to lead the commission through the findings of fact worksheet, which Brozek did.

After going through the findings of fact worksheet, Zeug moved to recommend approval of Conditional Use Permit #10-20, subject to the conditions proposed by staff.

The motion was seconded by Huseby and passed unanimously.

The Commissioners reviewed and discussed the minutes from the September 28, 2020 Planning Commission meeting.

Forkrud made a motion to approve the September 28, 2020 Planning Commission minutes as presented. Zeug seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

The Commissioners discussed the proposed regular meeting schedule for 2021. Forkrud stated he would like to move the meetings to Tuesdays.

The Commissioners agreed this would work for them.

Brozek stated that the meetings should be scheduled so that they did not overlap with the County Board meetings, which are on the first and third Tuesdays of the month. He said he would contact building maintenance to see whether there would be a scheduling conflict with the last Tuesday of the month.

Forkrud made a motion to adopt the proposed schedule, but with the meetings on the last Tuesday of the month, instead of the last Monday, contingent on Brozek determining that this will not be a conflict with existing uses of the meeting room.

Huseby seconded the motion and it was passed unanimously.

Brozek informed the Commissioners about upcoming applications and potential applications. Applications have been received for the January meeting, as follows:

1. Application to rezone land outside the City of Morgan to build a Dollar General store.
2. Application to rezone land outside the City of Wabasso to build a Dollar General store.
3. Application for CUP for a 1MW community solar garden north of Morgan.

Brozek has been in communication with individuals, but has not received applications yet, regarding the following projects:

1. Granite quarry expansion – Sherman Twp.
2. Shooting range expansion – western Redwood County
3. Feedlot expansion – Springdale Twp.

The Commissioners discussed the officers for 2021. The rotating schedule has Huseby as Chair and Zeug as Vice-chair.

At 1:38 p.m. Kaufenberg made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Madsen, and passed unanimously.



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Nick Brozek  
Land Use & Zoning Supervisor  
Redwood County Environmental Office



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Mike Scheffler, Chair  
Redwood County Planning Commission