

MARCH 24, 2022

The Board of Supervisors of Clinton County, Iowa, met. Present were Supervisors Determann, Irwin and Srp. Minutes of the previous meeting were read and approved.

6:00 P.M. Public Hearing – Solicit comments on rezoning application 4343 of Hawkeye Solar and rezoning application 4344 of Hatchling Solar

Chairman Determann called a public hearing to order at 6:06 p.m.

Proof of publication was provided, approved and returned for filing.

Present were Supervisors Irwin and Srp, County Auditor Eric Van Lancker, County Planning and Zoning Director Thomas Barnes, County Attorney Mike Wolf, public and media.

Sam O'Keefe, project developer for Ranger Power, provided a review of the proposed solar project. Bret Dublinske, attorney for the project, addressed compliance issues. He said the County's outside consultant has said that the application does meet the requirements. He said the findings support the approval of the application.

Determann reminded the room that no decisions will be made tonight and the Board is here to collect input from the public. He said the Board will meet April 7 to begin its deliberations.

Objections from the public included:

A resident concerned about their health as batteries from the solar panels may catch fire and release toxic gasses. She was also concerned about polluting ground water and the high pitched constant buzz from the solar field.

One resident said the County's own zoning ordinances states the laws are there to protect the quality of life that attracted them to the County.

A resident surrounded on three sides by the proposed project asked the County to wait for legislation that places the setback at 1,000 feet or more as opposed to the current proposed setback. He said the Board should consider the thoughts of someone who has lived here for 10 years.

One resident stated the solar panels will not produce the amount of power Ranger Power claims which will affect the amount of utility tax paid to Clinton County. She said agland in the County should not be put aside for inefficient solar panels that will sell its power out of state. She said foreign crops cannot be relied upon and highly productive farm ground should not be set aside for inefficient solar panels.

A resident pointed out that the planning and zoning commission voted against the applications.

A neighbor to the proposed project said she is not happy about looking at or being around the project. She is concerned taking productive agland out of production because every acre should be used to grow food to feed the world.

Another neighbor to the project said they have been prepping their land for game and said the solar panels will not support the wildlife in the area. She added that shooting around the property could be an issue if solar panels are located there. She said it hurts quality of life as they wanted rural Iowa property. She added the productive agland should be used to grow food.

One resident who lives in the project area said this is a sellers' market, but this project will affect the property values by lowering them because sellers may not want to buy a home surrounded by solar panels.

A resident said there is a section in the County ordinance that states a non-ag purpose shall not be used on land that meets certain thresholds as this land does. He said he doubts the company will bring a crew from outside the area and will work only temporarily. He added that these solar panels will become obsolete in the next decade as technology is upgraded and wondered if they will be abandoned.

A resident near the proposed project said this issue should be tabled since state legislation is being considered to address solar fields. She said the legislation being considered would disqualify the proposed project in Clinton County. She also said the Planning and Zoning Commission voted against recommending the application for approval. She said decisions should not be made by money.

One resident said scrap prices are a roller coaster and a lot of time have to pay to get rid of it, addressing decommissioning concerns. He added the view of the land will be destroyed and it will hurt residential property values as potential buyers will decrease. He said property lines should be considered, not actual residence when considering setbacks. He asked who would put panels on their property if you take the money out of the equation.

One resident said no one said they live near a solar panel field and they love it.

Another resident said the bill did not get out of the funnel, but it can be attached to another ag bill. He said corn eats carbon dioxide that is being blamed for climate change. He was concerned that if this project is allowed it will open up the County to more projects. He suggested that the master plan needs to be updated. He said it is not known if the panels contain heavy metals and should be tested annually if this project happens. He said an inspector needs to be appointed to make sure the proposed panels are actually installed. He said the decommission assurance should be in cash and not a bond.

One resident said the master plan for the County does not reference utility or solar installations. He said the proposed areas are set as agland. He said the master plan must be revised if solar is the County's destination. He said this would make spot zoning which has been deemed illegal in a court case in the State of Iowa. He said solar can be a part of Clinton County but applications should be denied as it is inconsistent with the County's master plan.

One resident said her neighbors concerns should be considered. She encouraged the Board to get a good idea of the soil and water impact and said the grading plan should be reviewed for effects on water flow. She also said tile damage in the ground should be considered from installation of the solar panels and asked who will make those repairs. She said some farmers don't own the land they farm and that should be considered. She said based on the applause in the room the public does not support the solar project.

One resident wondered if the rules have been followed as it relates to the required stipulations under the Board of Adjustments. She said she has land in Illinois near solar projects and they were full of issues before they even started. She added this increases the national debt because the projects are subsidized by the federal government. She said the winners are China and Warren Buffet.

One neighbor to the project said these projects are subsidized by taxpayers. He said those solar farms can produce millions of dollars every year and very little of those dollars will stay in Clinton County. He said outside workers will be brought in and believes that local labor should be used. He also mentioned all of the Supervisors are republican and the people signed up for these solar fields are Republican stating their party complains about the Green New Deal until the government is handing out subsidies.

A neighbor of the project said she is proud of the community for speaking up.

A neighbor to the project said he spoke to the project representatives and knows many of those who signed up to turn their property to solar fields. He said there is no way this won't lower residential property values. He asked if there will be issues with blowing snow. He also wondered where would a four-lane Highway 30 project go. He would like this matter tabled until the legislature is out of session.

A person who recently moved to Clinton County in 2019 near the project said he would not have moved here if the solar fields were here.

One person moved here three years ago and said it is gorgeous here and it would be a huge mistake if this project is approved. He said this is why land is zoned and this is zoned for agriculture.

A resident said he heard existing agreements can decrease after the solar panels are installed.

A resident is concerned the solar panels will cause more rainwater runoff.

One resident wants the Board to consider density of the solar farms. He said the Board should determine how much excess capacity there is and use that to decide how much more should be allowed. He also said 50% of these projects are financed using public funds through tax credits. He added all of the equipment is made in China.

Support from the public included:

A participating landowner in the solar farm project asked why foreign investors can invest in agland properties so why can't land owners rent their land the way they wish. He also wondered why the Iowa DOT hasn't attended any meetings. He said the trucks from the solar panel installation are no more destructive to the County roads than normal ag business traffic.

One advocate spoke about the rights of property owners and said this project checks all the boxes required by the Clinton County. He pointed out that this will conserve agland. He said this will allow Iowa to export energy instead of buying it from Wisconsin.

A landowner who supports the project said she was skeptical about placing solar panels on her land and did research about how the solar fields work. She also researched how the land would be taken care of while the solar panels are on the land. She said this is a win-win situation that will provide for her retirement and provide revenue for the County.

One County resident said solar panels are more efficient to provide power than the same amount of corn.

A representative of a renewable energy consulting firm said it ensures that urban sprawl cannot happen. He said it will provide tax revenue to the County and two school districts and will preserve land. He said this will help secure energy independence from foreign energy. A participating landowner in the project spoke about land owner's rights. He said the Planning & Zoning Commission vote was unjust considering the County's ordinances. He said the footprint of the amount of land coming out of production is actually very small in the County. He said this project will block pipelines from coming through. He said the last pipeline project that went through the County is still causing impacts that are evident. He said this ordinance has been in the books for six years. He said the increase in utility tax dollars will help the County and especially the Calamus-Wheatland Community School District.

A sustainable agriculture and renewable energy consultant said Clinton County has good policy that will lead to a good project. He said he wrote the policy that Johnson County uses and that Linn County uses which is mirrored by Clinton County. He said this project is a win for everyone involved. He said the bill in the legislature died in the funnel on Friday. He said the bill was put together by a legislature who made the restrictions a poison pill as they

would make the solar fields too costly to operate as it would require twice the land. He said this is a property rights issue.

A Bright Future Iowa representative believes the solar project is important to local and state economy and is important to national energy independence. He said it will support rural economic development. He said the expanded tax base will benefit all county taxpayers. He said property rights need to be considered and this process doesn't use eminent domain. He said this is drought proof revenue for the land owners and the setbacks are more than what are required by the County's ordinance.

MOTION by Supervisor Srp to adjourn the public hearing.

Roll Call: Srp: Yes; Irwin: Yes; Determann: Yes.
at 8:01 p.m.

Motion carried. The public hearing was adjourned

The Board of Supervisors adjourned to meet on Monday, March 28, 2022 at 9:00 a.m. at the Clinton County Administration Building, Clinton, IA.

Eric Van Lancker, County Auditor

Tom Determann, Chairperson

-APPROVED-

County Auditor

Chairperson