



City of Colusa California

STAFF REPORT

DATE: June 4, 2025
TO: Planning Commission – Action Item – Public Hearing
FROM: Jake Morley, Planning Consultant

AGENDA ITEM: NextGrid Solar Development Project

Recommendation: Planning Commission to open the Public Hearing and approve NextGrid Solar Use Permit and Lot(s) Merger and find the project exempt from California Environmental Quality Act pursuant to 15183 - Projects Consistent with a Community Plan, General Plan, or Zoning.

Proposed Motion: I move that the Planning Commission adopt Resolution No. 25-___, approving NextGrid Solar Use Permit and Lot Merger and finding the project exempt pursuant to section 15183 of the California Environmental Quality Act, subject to Conditions of Approval.

SUMMARY

The proposed project site is approximately 27 acres in size and is to the northeast of the Colusa Municipal Airport (See **Location Aerial, Attachment 1**) at the western terminus of Niagara Road. The project site is located in the M-2 – General Industrial zoning district and is designated Industrial on the General Plan diagram, with a portion of the site located in the C2 Airport Land Use Overflight zone. The entire site currently consists of seven Assessor Parcel Numbers (APN 017-130-122, -123, -124, -125, -126, -127 and -128). The site is bordered by vacant lands to the north and west and with industrial uses east and south. The site has been routinely mowed, graded and disturbed with no environmental resources present. The project includes the following components:

1. A Use Permit to authorize the installation of 7,235.8 Kilowatts Direct Current (KW DC) and supporting infrastructure and improvements.
2. A Lot Merger to allow the merger of all seven existing parcels into one.

BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS:

The project site is located at 2949 Niagara Avenue and will take access via an existing gravel access service road that terminates in a large turnaround to allow for service and fire trucks to

turnaround. A perimeter road circles the entire solar array to permit emergency vehicles and maintenance trucks access to all corners of the site.

The proposed solar array field will contain approximately 13,156 modules (panels) that will be installed in a series of north-south rows to allow the panels to track with the sun in an east west manner. The single axis tracking system allows the panels to lay flat at approximately 9.5 feet, but when fully rotated to extend to a height of 16 feet (See **Proposed Site Plan and Project Details, Attachment 2**).

A Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) is a system that monitors the system as well as stores energy from the solar panels and allows for the release of power when it is needed most. The BESS monitors the voltage, temperature, fire warning and the state of charge of the batteries. The BESS system will be mounted on a concrete slab and will have bollards placed in a manner to prevent unintentional vehicle strikes to the system. It is anticipated that the project site would be visited at least four times a year by maintenance crews to ensure equipment is working correctly and to clean the panels as necessary.

The proposal includes surrounding the site with a six-foot chain-link fence. Pursuant to the General Plan Policy (CCD-2:4) new development shall ensure that public utilities are screened from view and do not detract from the surrounding environment. Therefore, staff recommends a condition of approval requiring the fence to be vinyl coated with privacy slates (green or brown) to ensure the site is minimized from view.

Primary access to the site will be from the terminus of Niagara Avenue at the northeastern corner of the site. Secondary access will be placed near the southeastern corner. The 10-foot-wide perimeter is proposed to circle the exterior boundary of the solar array. Pursuant to Colusa Municipal Code, roadways that are one direction shall be 12-feet wide, therefore a staff recommends an additional condition of approval ensuring the perimeter access road meets CMC standards.

Colusa County Airport Land Use Commission

The Site is located approximately 0.24 miles west of the Colusa County Airport, a public-use airport.

On March 3, 2025, Colusa County Airport Land Use Commission (ALUC) reviewed the proposed Use Permit and Lot Merger and found the project to be in compliance with the 2014 Colusa County Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan (ALUCP) in that the proposed changes are consistent with the C2 Compatibility Zones (See **ALUC Resolution, Attachment 3**).

City of Colusa Fire Department and Sacramento River Fire District

Given that the subject site is located near the airport, the property is jointly served by both the City of Colusa Fire Department as well as the Sacramento River Fire District, as such, city staff requested comments from both departments to ensure that any safety concerns were addressed with appropriate conditions of approval.

The City of Colusa Fire Chief requested that the Fire Department adequately serve the site in a fire emergency setting, that at least two additional fire hydrants be placed within the boundary of the site, one near the northwest corner and a second at the southeast corner. In addition, the Fire Department has requested that in those locations the perimeter road be widened to

accommodate the staging of a fire vehicle while allowing vehicles to still pass through the area. Currently there is an existing hydrant approximately 330 feet from the northwest corner of the project boundary.

In discussing the needs with the Sacramento River Fire Districted, they commented that they would like evidence to be provided that the BESS equipment contains both a suppression and smoke detection system. Therefore, staff recommends an additional condition of approval that such information is provided, reviewed and approved prior to the issuance of a building permit.

GENERAL PLAN

The subject property is designated Industrial on the General Plan diagram and located in the M2-General Industrial District. The Land Use section of the General Plan notes that the Industrial designation is intended to accommodate more intense industrial uses, including manufacturing, warehousing and processing application. The Industrial land has been designated where necessary services such as transportation systems and utilities existing or can be efficiently provided and where disruption to adjacent uses will be minimal.

The placement of the solar field on the western edge of the Industrial land located at the Colusa Municipal Airport, will act as a buffer between the other industrial operations and airport and to the recently approved Wescott Ranch Subdivision which is located to the west of this property. This land use would have minimal to no impacts on future residence to the west.

The following General Plan Goals, Policies and Actions are applicable to the project:

Policy LU-5.1: To ensure growth occurs in the orderly, compact, and efficient manner, so that municipal services and infrastructure can be extended at the least possible cost.

Policy LU-10.5: Industrial and light industrial uses shall be concentrated in two areas of the City: on the west side of Colusa along Fourteenth Street, the SR 20 corridor south of Vann property and the Colusa County Fairgrounds, and the Pirelli property; and on the southeast side of the City along the SR 20/45 corridor, between Country Club Estates/Golf Course and the airport.

Policy CCD-2:4: New development shall ensure that public utilities are screened from view and do not detract from the surrounding environment.

Policy CCD-2.5: The City shall ensure that infrastructure improvements demonstrate sensitivity to any natural systems affecting a project site.

Policy CCD-3.18: The City shall ensure that utility infrastructure projects comply with the design objectives of the community and any specific area standards and guidelines

Policy N-1.8: The City shall protect Colusa residents from noise related to the Colusa County Airport operations.

FINDINGS

The required findings for adopting a California Environmental Quality Act exemption and findings for Lot Merger and Use Permit approval are provided as part of the Planning Commission Resolution (see **Attachment 4, Exhibit I – Conditions of Approval**).

PUBLIC CONTACT AND ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

On March 21, 2025, a 20-day public hearing notice was mailed to all landowners and residents within 300 feet of the site, and a legal notice was published in Pioneer Review. Pursuant to California Environmental Quality Act Guidelines, Section 15183 provide an exemption from additional environmental review for projects that are consistent with development intensity/density established by existing zoning, community plan or general plan policies for which an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) was certified.

BUDGET IMPACT: None Expected

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Location Aerial
2. Proposed Site Plan and Project Details
3. ALUC Resolution
4. Planning Commission Resolution 25 - ____
Exhibit I – Conditions of Approval
Exhibit II – Plat to Accompany Use Permit