



Town of Cortland

Planning Commission Meeting

Lions Den 70 S Llanos Street Cortland, IL 60112

June 04, 2026

MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER / PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chair Hedrick called the regular meeting of the Planning Commission to order at 6:30 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

SWEARING IN RE-APPOINTED PLANNING COMMISSIONERS

1. Swearing in re-appointed commissioners Lawson and Torres.

Town Clerk Cheryl Aldis swore in Ms. Victoria Torres and Mr. Brad Lawson as Planning Commissioners, with a terms to expire April 2029.

ROLL CALL

Roll was called showing as present Mark Hedrick, Mariann Kaminski, Trent Moser, Julie Steadman, Brad Lawson and Victoria Torres. No Commissioners were absent. Quorum was present. Also present were Zoning Administrator Brandy Williams, Town Clerk Cheryl Aldis, and Deputy Town Clerk Catherine Koks.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Ms. Torres moved to approve the agenda as presented, seconded by Ms. Kaminski. A unanimous voice vote carried the motion.

PUBLIC WISHING TO SPEAK

There was no public wishing to speak on matters other than the public hearings.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

2. Approve Planning Commission Minutes of April 2, 2026

Ms. Torres made a motion to approve the Planning Commission Minutes of April 2, 2026. Seconded by Ms. Kaminski. A unanimous voice vote carried the motion.

PUBLIC HEARING

3. Apex Clean Energy, LLC, as applicant, has filed with the Town of Cortland a request for a Special Use Permit in accordance with Title 9, Chapter 10, Section 6B of the Cortland Town Code regarding a property located at East North Avenue, DeKalb County, Illinois. The 77.54-acre site is located east of Somonauk Road, generally bounded by East Meadow Drive on the north and East North Avenue on the south, known as PIN 09-20-426-002. The applicant is requesting a Special Use Permit on the subject property to, upon annexation, construct, operate, and maintain a Solar Farm as set forth in Title 9, Chapter 4, Section 34 of the Cortland Town Code.

Public Hearing

Chair Hedrick opened the Public Hearing at 6:35 p.m. Deputy Town Clerk Koks read the public notice into the record. The notice was published in the *Daily Chronicle* on May 14, 2026, meeting the requirements of the law.

Chair Hedrick swore in those wishing to testify. Apex Clean Energy Development Manager Sidonie Shira and resident Peg Sloat were sworn in.

Applicant's Testimony

Ms. Shira addressed the commissioners with a presentation about construction of a solar farm on one parcel, yet to be annexed, in the Town of Cortland. Apex Clean Energy is an American-owned, veteran-led clean power producer. They build and operate solar arrays, batteries and storage. She stated that the power generated by this farm would go directly to the Glidden substation, addressed on Pleasant Street, that services Cortland. ComEd customers can subscribe for free to this specific energy program for a discount on their bill.

The planned project is a 5-megawatt farm, which is the maximum size allowed, and will take 3-6 months to build. This would be a 40-year operation and then fully decommissioned. The farm is remotely operated by Apex and would have minimal in-person visits. The location was chosen based on electrical need in the area and availability of appropriate space for the project. The total area needed for the project has been scaled down from the initial presentation in March.

This project would use 28.8 acres of the 77.54-acre parcel. The preliminary site plan for the location of the panels has been shifted to the southeastern portion of the property with a single driveway off North Avenue. This plan incorporated larger setbacks and accounted for access to connect stub roads. The interconnection line to the south will be upgraded instead of the line to the west. More vegetative screening will be used, and it was stated that the agricultural land can easily be returned to current use after decommissioning. Shira expressed that there would be no burden to local utilities.

Shira outlined the project priorities, including the objective to responsibly develop with respect for current and future land use, considering the overall impact to the community including noise level, partnering with local businesses, when possible, no effect or positive effect on property values and providing clean, reliable energy to the local grid at an affordable cost to subscribers. She also listed economic benefits to the Town of Cortland, including approximately \$1.16 million dollars in local tax revenue over the project's 40-year operation period. There would also be about 25 full-time construction jobs created during the construction period and the overall capital investment to Cortland by the project is approximately \$18 million dollars.

Shira stated that Grand Prairie Solar/Apex Clean Energy held a second meet and greet on June 2, 2026, and had extended invitations to residents in the area adjacent to and surrounding the new proposed location. They were available to answer questions about the project and about 13 residents attended. She also noted that a decommissioning plan had been submitted and the costs of \$605,932.00 will be bonded and reviewed periodically.

She addressed agreements and studies that had been completed. They also confirmed that there will be no impact on DeKalb-Taylor Municipal Airport. Grand Parade also has an executed agreement and full funding for Interconnection along East North Avenue with ComEd. A vegetation management plan was designed to conform with the Illinois Pollinator-Friendly Solar Act and maintenance of the vegetation was discussed.

Shira acknowledged concerns from a previous hearing regarding impacts on residential property values. She stated that an appraiser came to the site to analyze and compare property values of homes adjacent to similar solar farms. Several examples of similar or increased property values were submitted in the application packet. She also acknowledged other concerns about health and safety risks associated with the make-up of

the panels. The components of the panels are exactly like panels on a residential roof-mounted system. They can break, but do not shatter, much like a car windshield. There is no leaching and no vaporizing of any element within the panels.

Public Testimony

Ms. Williams read one letter, submitted as required, by the public:

Andra Olson: Ms. Olson wrote a letter in favor of the proposed solar farm. She is the landowner and stated that she had done a large amount of research on Apex when she was approached about the use of the land. She stated that Apex's flexibility in working not only with her, but with county and local regulations was one of the reasons she feels they are a good match for the project and the community. She asked that the commission recommend approving the special use permit.

In-Person testimony was given by the following:

Peg Sloat of Cortland addressed the commission. She had a question about the distance from the project to the nearest residence. The response from Ms. Williams was that the project has met the minimum standard for setbacks from the nearest residence. Ms. Sloat also had a question about vegetative screening, which she stated was answered in the presentation.

Rebuttal

There was no rebuttal from the applicant and there were no further questions.

Staff Report

Ms. Williams reported that the proposed project is in conformance with the 2023 Comprehensive Plan.

BACKGROUND

The subject property has been used as farmland for decades. The subject property is fronted with potable water and electric along East North Avenue. Sanitary sewer is adjacent on the north and south sides of the subject parcel. Storm sewer exists on the easterly limit of the subject site. Roadway access could be provided at multiple entrances.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The Town adopted a Comprehensive Plan in September 2023, which guides development throughout the community. The Future Land Use Map within the Comprehensive Plan depicts the subject property as Agricultural use. The default zoning does coincide with the Comprehensive Plan. There is no distinction in the Future Land Use Map for Special Use Permits or for Solar Energy Systems, specifically.

TECHNICAL REVIEW AND VARIANCE REQUESTS

Water, sanitary sewer, and storm sewer utilities are not required for the project. Any electric infrastructure will be completed by the developer or ComEd as part of the interconnection agreements. This would likely consist of additional and/or larger poles along North Somonauk Road or East North Avenue. Once the facility is operational and the construction traffic ceases, vehicular access will be nominal.

Previous planning indicates the intent to connect Prairie Street from the Prairieview Subdivision on the south to NeuCort Lakes Subdivision on the north. Cardinal Street also currently dead ends at the northern property of the subject project.

Variances from Town Code have been requested as part of the application. These variances are summarized as:

1. **Maximum Height.** Grand Parade Solar respectfully requests that the five-utility pole line-up proposed for interconnection to ComEd's electrical grid be exempted from the 15-foot maximum height restriction outlined in the Cortland Zoning Ordinance, Section 9-4-34(1)(e).
2. **Power and Communication Lines.** Grand Parade Solar further requests that the same five utility pole line-up described above and illustrated in Figure 1 in the application be exempted from the underground power and communication line requirements that may otherwise apply under Cortland Zoning Ordinance, Section 9-4-34(4), for this section only.
3. **Restoration Requirements.** Grand Parade Solar requests that underground electrical cables installed at a depth greater than five (5) feet be exempted from the removal requirement specified in Cortland Zoning Ordinance, Section 9-4-34(16)(b). This request aligns with the State's underground cabling depth provisions in the Agricultural Impact Mitigation Agreement (AIMA), Section 17(4), which states: "Transformers, inverters, energy storage facilities, or substations, including all components and foundations; however, underground cables at a depth of 5 feet or greater may be left in place."

Deliberations

Question from Ms. Torres about the reason why the request was changed from two parcels to one. Response: the change in the substation connection allowed the plan to be changed to limit the space needed.

Question from Mr. Moser about where the 5 poles are located. Response: they are located along east North Avenue.

Question from Ms. Steadman about families that were initially concerned about seeing the panels from a 2nd floor window. Response: vegetative screening has been increased and there was also a study done on the topography of the area.

Question from Mr. Moser about what specific type of vegetation/tree would be used. Response: arborvitae would be used as well as bushes of an unknown variety.

Question from audience about who manages the maintenance of the vegetation. Response: Apex will send staff to mow and maintain.

Question from audience about who pays for decommissioning. Response the cost is bonded by Apex and will be reviewed periodically and updated as necessary.

Question from Ms. Steadman and Mr. Moser whether there would be any impediment on future development. Response no, there would be no issue with future development and Ms. Williams outlined the directions development could occur.

Question from Ms. Steadman about whether the upgrade to the substation would mean more constant power service. Response: the upgrade would increase the capability and the efficiency of the system, but it would still be subject to outages.

Question from Mr. Lawson about what deviations the Town could see in the plan. Response: that slight deviations in road location, panel style, and panel configuration could occur.

Question from Mr. Lawson about the setup of the subscription to the energy generated by the project. Response: that subscription to the project first comes first served and free to subscribers. The subscribers can come from anywhere and there must be a mix of both business and residential subscribers.

Question from Ms. Aldis asking if the project will ever connect to the other North Avenue solar farm connection. Response: no, this is a standalone project.

Question from audience about what happens when there is heavy snow. Response: the weather is monitored constantly by remote operators, and the panels will be moved to an upright position to prevent accumulation.

Question from Mr. Hedrick about how often decommissioning cost is reviewed. Ms. Williams responded that AIMA standards will be followed. Generally, the cost is revisited every ten years. It was also noted that any property violations would be addressed by the town.

Question from Ms. Steadman about what other questions were asked at the meeting with the public on June 2nd. Response: most questions were related to leaching and chemical concerns from the panels.

Question from Ms. Torres about requirement to offer subscriptions. Response: are legally required to offer subscriptions for the energy generated. Legislation was passed in 2021. You would likely not subscribe to more than one project. The proposed project would offer 20% off ComEd bill.

Then, hearing no more questions for deliberations, Mr. Hedrick closed the public hearing at 7:39 p.m.

Review Standards/Findings of Fact

Mr. Lawson made the statement that not only is this project part of a generational farm operation, but it is also a generation's decision for the Town. His interpretation of the 2023 Comprehensive Plan outlines the priority projects for the Town, and while solar does appear, it is low priority. He stated that the Town Board does not have a plan for solar projects and he would like them to be proactive when planning and approving. He encouraged all the commissioners to be aware of what is in the Comprehensive Plan and stressed that ad hoc decisions are not a strategy. There needs to be an exercise on how to do it, so the next generation is not affected. If the Olson family sells the property, it's zoned Ag and will have special use permit. If construction does not begin within the time set in the Town Code, the special use permit is null.

Standard A (9-10-3.A)

The proposed structure or use at the particular location requested is necessary or desirable to provide a service or a facility which is in the interest of the public and will contribute to the general welfare of the neighborhood or community.

The commission concurs that the project would provide property tax benefits, increase capacity on the grid, and upgrade infrastructure.

Standard B (9-10-3.B)

The proposed structure or use will not have a substantial adverse effect upon the adjacent property, the character of the neighborhood, traffic conditions, utility facilities and other matters affecting safety and general welfare:

The commission concurs that the project would provide adequate vegetative screening, scheduled maintenance on said property, and use of pollinator plants.

Standard C (9-10-3.C)

The proposed structure or use will be designed, arranged and operated so as to permit the development and use of neighboring property in accordance with the applicable district regulations.

The commission concurs that the project has accommodated current utilities and future road expansion.

Standard D (9-10-3.D)

Such other standards and criteria as are established by the ordinance for a particular special use as set forth in section 9-10-4 of this chapter and as applied to planned developments as set forth in chapter 7 of this title.

This standard is not applicable.

Mr. Moser made a motion to approve the Standards as read, seconded by Ms. Kaminski.

Roll Call vote:

Yea: Commissioners Moser, Hedrick, Lawson, Steadman, Torres, and Kaminski

Nay: None

Absent: None

Motion Carried

Recommendation

The planning commission finds no additional conditions need to be applied.

Ms. Steadman made a motion to recommend the Town Board Approve the Request for a Special Use Permit for Apex Clean Energy, LLC in accordance with Title 9, Chapter 4, Section 34 of the Cortland Town Code regarding a property located at East North Avenue, DeKalb County, Illinois. The 77.54-acre site is located east of Somonauk Road, generally bounded by East Meadow Drive on the north and East North Avenue on the south, known as PIN 09-20-426-002. Ms. Torres seconded the motion.

Roll Call vote:

Yea: Commissioners Moser, Hedrick, Steadman, Torres, Kaminski

Nay: Commissioner Lawson

Absent: None

Motion Carried

STAFF REPORTS

Ms. Williams reported that the July Planning Commission meeting will be canceled. The August meeting may also be cancelled.

REPORT OF THE CHAIR

There was no report.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Mr. Moser moved, seconded by Ms. Torres, to elect by acclamation the same officers as the preceding year for the coming year. Chair - Mark Hedrick, Vice Chair - Brad Lawson, Secretary - Victoria Torres for a term of one year, ending June 2027.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS FOR DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION

There was no unfinished business.

NEW BUSINESS FOR DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION

4. Consider a motion to Amend Policy No.1
This policy amendment, if approved, would bring the language in the Town of Cortland Planning Commission Remote Attendance Policy to current legal compliance.

5. Consider A Motion To Amend Policy No.2
This policy amendment, if approved, would bring the language in the Town of Cortland Planning Commission Persons To Be Heard Policy to current legal compliance.

Mr. Lawson made a motion to accept amendments to Planning Commission Policies #1 and #2 as presented, seconded by Ms. Torres.

The Planning Commissioners reviewed the proposed language amendments for Policies #1 and #2 related to Remote Attendance and Persons To Be Heard. Clerk Aldis explained that the changes bring the policies into compliance with current laws and mirror the policies of the Town Board.

Roll Call vote:

Yea: Commissioners Moser, Hedrick, Lawson, Steadman, Torres, and Kaminski

Nay: None

Absent: None

Motion Carried

COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

There were no reports.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Kaminski made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Lawson. A unanimous voice vote carried the motion. The meeting adjourned at 8:08pm

Respectfully submitted by:

Catherine Koks, Deputy Town Clerk