



Town of Cortland

Planning Commission Meeting

Town Hall, 59 S. Somonauk Road Cortland, IL 60112

April 02, 2026 at 6:30 PM

MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER / PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE / ROLL CALL

Acting Chair Brad Lawson called the regular meeting of the Planning Commission to order at 6:36 p.m. The meeting was held at Cortland Fire Protection District training room, 30 W North Ave, Cortland, IL. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited and roll was called. Shown as present were Brad Lawson, Victoria Torres, Julie Steadman, Trent Moser, and Mariann Kaminski. Shown as absent was Mark Hedrick. Quorum was present. Also present was Zoning Administrator Brandy Williams.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Ms. Kaminski moved to approve the agenda as presented, seconded by Ms. Steadman. Unanimous voice vote carried the motion.

PUBLIC WISHING TO SPEAK

No persons present wished to speak.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Ms. Torres moved to approve the minutes of March 5, 2026 as presented, seconded by Ms. Kaminski. Unanimous voice vote carried the motion.

1. Approve Planning Commission Minutes of March 5, 2026

Ms. Torres moved to approve the minutes of March 5, 2026 as presented, seconded by Ms. Kaminski. Unanimous voice vote carried the motion.

PUBLIC HEARING

2. SolarStone Partners, applicant, has filed with the Town of Cortland a request for a Special Use Permit, regarding property located north of IL Route 38, and south of the Union Pacific Railroad, De Kalb County, IL (80.33 ac) PINs 09-27-100-002 and 09-27-300-004, to Construct, Operate and Maintain a Solar Garden as set forth in Title 9, Chapter 4, Section 34 of the Cortland Town Code.

Chair Lawson gave a brief overview of the expectations of the hearing processes. The public hearing was called to order at 6:37 p.m.

Chair Lawson asked any person wishing to testify to stand and be sworn. Clerk Aldis read the public hearing notice into the record.

Applicant Josh Marshall introduced himself, landowner Jamie Walter, and Attorney Richard Porter. Mr. Marshall presented a PowerPoint presentation regarding the location, size and construction specifications proposed for the use of the land regarding the proposal for a Special Use Permit for SolarStone Partners to construct, operate and maintain a solar garden as set forth. The land identification PIN's are 09-27-100-002 and 09-27-300-004 comprising 80.33 acres located north of IL Route 38 and south of the Union Pacific Railroad. In his presentation Mr. Marshall stated they would use a combined 37 acers for this proposed solar garden. The projection of

created power is the equivalent of 1500 households. There would be 1200 feet from the fence and 1300 feet from the panels, there is no public right-of-way around this project. The wiring will be underground to the transformer. Subscriptions would involve 15 to 20% discount, on average. Mr. Marshall addressed toxicity Characteristic Leaching Procedure (TCLP) stating the EPA says this is non-hazardous for modern solar panels.

not liquid inside glass panel

no documented ground water contamination, field studies, lab testing have been conducted.

Property values:

Annexation - Mr. Marshall reported that this site is adjacent to railroad tracks and a wastewater treatment plant. Uses with these features have been documented with 5-20% negative property value impacts. A 5 MW solar farm is the least impactful use for this site, supported by peer-reviewed Midwest-specific research. Solar facilities are quiet, low-traffic, and non-polluting - no odor, no vibration, no diesel exhaust. The project would generate with annexation and an approved Special Use Permit at a tax rate of 7.917% an amount of \$50,661 per year in local property taxes without burdening public services. A long-term site plan provides certainty vs unknown future development. The Town and Cortland Library, over 25 years, would could receive \$175,000 at zero cost to the town.

If the project were to be a county only approval with a tax rate of 6.825% would be a generating for the county \$43,669 per year with no additional revenue to the town or library.

Public testimony

Chair Lawson reminded those speaking that they would be address the Planning Commission members and not the applicant.

Attorney Porter addressed the Commission stating that he would be willing to answer questions of the public, if allowed.

Kimberly Dettman addressed the Commission stating that she lives on Somonauk Road. It is noted for the record that she was sworn in to testify, however, the testimony was on an unrelated project to the open public hearing, therefore, could not be recorded.

Heather Black was sworn in to testify. She asked for clarification regarding the process of the application. If the town were to decline the project it is her understanding that the application process can be taken to the county. If the county approves the application, the project goes forward with no additional revenue coming to the town.

Jamie Walter reported that he farms around the county. He does have operable solar projects currently. He stated he has worked with SolarStone in the past. He has spoken with many companies. He feels they are working with a reputable company. There is farm land currently being farmed around solar fields. Income for farming is tough. Solar allows a way to generate revenue and continue crop farming. The solar project is generally a 20-year project with an extension possible. When the solar project is finished the area is decommissioned and returned to farm land. This land has been "rested" during the duration of the project. The

plantings under the panels is a known wildlife habitat and the prime farmland is not being destroyed. It is a temporary use. The solar produces 20 to 30-years of energy productions vs the use of biofuel. This is not a food issue as 40% of corn crops are used for biofuel; solar creates electricity. The Walter's believe this is a winning project.

Rebuttal

Mr. Marshall stated that there are challenges with solar. He is willing to answer questions. He stated that vegetative screening is required by the Soil and Water Conservation District. There would be ag woven wire fence, no barbed wire would be used. When speaking regarding data centers and use of many acres for solar Mr. Marshall stated that the application process begins with ComEd. The uses are for homes and businesses and then other uses. These are smaller grid projects.

Ms. Williams address Ms. Black's question. She stated there is a potential of this scenario and the answer could be, yes, within 1-1/2 miles of the Cortland corporate limits. The applicant would prepare materials for the county. Following state law, if the project meets the requirements of the county the project would be approved.

Mr. Porter further replied, if the project meets the county regulations this it cannot deny the approval or would be subject to litigation.

Mr. Marshall stated that the project would be built in a six to 12 month timeframe; it is the fastest way to increase electric supply.

Staff Report

Ms. Williams stated the application has not changed. The Board approved the annexation of the land, however, denied the special use permit. The hearing recommendation was remanded back to the Planning Commission by the Board of Trustees.

Deliberations

Ms. Steadman asking about damaged panels, how often are they looked after?

Mr. Marshall stated all panels are monitored locally (in a radius) and regularly. It takes hours to days for repair.

Mr. Moser asked if the project is fenced or just vegetation.

Mr. Marshall replied, both. Screening is outside the fence, trees could be six foot tall, but not eight, this is a design feature.

Mr. Moser stated he appreciates where this project is located.

Ms. Steadman asked if these projects take in to consideration growth, and do they take pressure of and provide renewable energy?

Mr. Marshall stated yeas, it helps, but it is not the full answer.

Ms. Kaminski asked how often the project is monitored.

Mr. Marshall stated that software programs monitor energy going on to the grid. They also monitor weather and adaptations can be made based upon predictions. An example would be predicted hail, the panels would be set in a vertical placement rather than flat.

With no further deliberations a motion to close the public hearing was entered by Ms. Torres and seconded by Ms. Steadman. Unanimous voice vote carried the motion. The public hearing closed a 7:35 p.m.

Review of Standards/Findings of Fact 9-10-3 Standards

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 finds that the proposed location is desirable if constructed as proposed; the project increases energy supply and could lower some electric rates, there is potential revenue increase for the town and the library

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

The commission finds that the design mitigates any adverse affects on adjacent properties, character of the neighboring properties is not impacted, the proposed location is desirable if constructed as proposed, traffic conditions would increase for short-term construction, the negative impact is considered minimal; there is no public health, safety or general welfare issues found.

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 finds the design is comprehensive, there are no red flags by looking at external sources, the design has appropriate fauna and flora, appropriate screening and the Commission has been given confidence the management company will comply with necessary maintenance as required in a timely manner.

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 (Ord. 2008-23, 1-28-2008)

Not applicable.

Ms. Torres moved to approve the Findings of Fact, seconded by Ms. Kaminski

Roll call vote:

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

Nay: None

Absent: Commissioner Hedrick Motion carried.

Recommendation

Ms. Torres moved to approve the request from SolarStone Partners for a Special Use Permit, regarding property located north of IL Route 38, and south of the Union Pacific Railroad, De Kalb County, IL (80.33 ac) PINs 09-27-100-002 and 09-27-300-004, to Construct, Operate and Maintain a Solar Garden as set forth in Title 9, Chapter 4, Section 34 of the Cortland Town Code. Ms. Steadman seconded the motion.

Roll call vote:

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

Nay: None

Absent: Commissioner Hedrick Motion carried.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS FOR DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION

There was no unfinished business.

NEW BUSINESS FOR DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION

There was no new business.

REPORT OF THE CHAIR

No report

COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

No report

LIAISON REPORT

No report

STAFF REPORTS

No report

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to discuss a motion for adjournment was entered by Mr. Lawson, seconded by Ms. Steadman and carried by unanimous voice vote. The meeting adjourned at 8:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Cheryl Aldis
Town Clerk