



Town of Cortland

Planning Commission Meeting

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

March 05, 2026 at 7:00 PM

MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER / PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chair Hedrick called the regular meeting of the Planning Commission to order at 7 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

SWEARING IN OF NEW PLANNING COMMISSIONER

Town Clerk Cheryl Aldis swore Ms. Mariann Kaminski as a Planning Commissioner, with a term to expire April 2027.

ROLL CALL

Roll was called showing as present Mark Hedrick, Mariann Kaminski, Trent Moser, Julie Steadman, and Victoria Torres. Shown as absent was Brad Lawson. 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. Steadman. 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

1. Approve Planning Commission Minutes of February 5, 2026

Ms. Torres made a motion to approve the Planning Commission Minutes of February 5, 2026. Seconded by Mr. Moser. A unanimous voice vote carried the motion.

PUBLIC HEARING

2. 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 Somonauk Road, DeKalb County, Illinois. The 116.9-acre site is located on the east side of Somonauk Road, generally bounded by East Meadow Lane on the north and East North Avenue on the south and comprised of PIN 09-20-401-006 and 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 7:03pm. Deputy Town Clerk Koks read the public notice into the record. The notice was published in the *Daily Chronicle* on February 14, 2026, meeting the requirements of the law.

Chair Hedrick swore in those wishing to testify. Zoning Administrator Brandy Williams and Apex Clean Energy Representative Sidonie Shira were sworn in.

Applicant's Testimony

Ms. Shira addressed the commissioners with a presentation about construction of a solar farm. Apex Clean Energy is an American-owned, veteran-led clean power producer. They build and operate solar arrays, batteries and storage. Any ComEd customer can subscribe for free to any community solar project.

She explained the proposed project cannot legally be larger than five megawatts. The arrays operate for 35-40 years efficiently. Shira explained the location of the proposal and the process taken to determine a good location for a project. She explained that setbacks have been increased and stump roads were addressed based on feedback from the Town Engineer.

She mentioned the attention to utility locations and the proposed vegetative screening planned for areas North and South of the parcels. Renderings have been supplied for what the area will look like with vegetation and crops at different times throughout the year. The transformer for the system is in the middle of the array and only makes noise during the day.

Shira reiterated this is not a permanent solar structure. At the end of the lease, the land will revert to agricultural use. She cited Loyola University Study from 2024 that studied the property tax implications and determined there would likely be no negative effects specifically in Illinois projects. She stated the parcels need to be annexed first before the special use can be approved and construction can begin. It was noted that the ComEd substations do need to be upgraded.

A decommissioning plan is included and total costs are expected to be approximately \$605,932. The FAA was contacted to consult about proximity to the DeKalb Airport. The submitted Vegetation Plan includes native grass and plants to reduce stormwater runoff and erosion. She stated the project does not pose a threat to state flora and fauna based on EPA studies conducted and included in the packet. A Cultural Resources investigation and Geotechnical Engineering Study still need to be done.

Public Testimony

Ms. Williams read three letters from the public submitted before the hearing:

Ivette Conde: Ms. Conde of Cortland wrote a letter not in favor of the proposed solar farm. She stated that the farm would take up space and cause displacement of location wildlife and issues with soil compaction, erosion and run-off. She also shared concerns about leaching hazardous materials (such as lead, cadmium, copper, indium, gallium, selenium, tellurium, and zinc) into the soil and groundwater and the potential strain on water systems. Her letter also addressed noise from inverters and transformers and temperature changes affecting soil moisture as well as fire risk related to battery storage. She asked the commission not to recommend approving the special use permit.

Anthony & Lindsey Podyma: Mr. and Ms. Podyma of Cortland wrote a letter not in favor of the proposed solar farm. They stated that they were drawn to Cortland for the small-town atmosphere and quiet living. They expressed concerns about environmental impacts, questions about Apex Clean Energy business practices, and effectiveness of the proposed vegetative screening. They asked the commission not to recommend approving the special use permit.

Kimmie Dettman: Ms. Dettman of Cortland wrote a letter not in favor of the proposed solar farm. She posed questions to the commission concerning ownership of the land, location of the proposed array, materials used in the panels, glare risks, monetary incentives for the DeKalb County and the State of Illinois, and projected start date. She asked the commission not to recommend approving the special use permit.

Chair Hedrick asked the public wishing to testify to stand and be sworn in. Testimony was given in-person by the following:

Nicole Kusch of Cortland addressed the commission and read a prepared statement in favor of the proposed solar farm. She stated that the property tax revenue to the town would be between \$20,000-\$40,000 a year and could be used for infrastructure improvements or investment in schools, events, or additional land purchases. She stated that homeowners and businesses could subscribe to lower energy costs. She mentioned that there is no increased traffic or need to expand infrastructure to operate the array and the visual impact would be minimal due to the location and the vegetative screening. She contacted the company and viewed online reviews. She does not want the Town and the landowner to miss benefiting from this project and asked the commission to recommend approving the special use permit.

Michael Kusch of Cortland addressed the commission in favor of the proposed solar farm. He also stated the \$20,000-\$40,000 property tax revenue to the town which he considered free passive income. He commented on the studies conducted by the

applicant to limit wildlife displacement. He stated that heavy metal leaching can be mitigated by the native vegetation planted around the array. He asked the commission to recommend approving the special use permit.

Anthony Medina of Cortland addressed the commission not in favor of the proposed solar farm. His concern was about visibility of the array from his house. He asked the commission not to recommend approving the special use permit.

Bill Larson of Cortland addressed the commission not in favor of the proposed solar farm. His concerns were about visibility of the array from his house as well as the proposed decommissioning costs and who would be responsible for those costs. He asked the commission not to recommend approving the special use permit.

Roger Lee Fronek of Cortland addressed the commission not in favor of the proposed solar farm. He does not feel construction is in the best interest of the neighborhoods that border the array. He asked the commission not to recommend approving the special use permit.

Rebuttal

Ms. Shira addressed several questions posed during the Public Testimony. There would be no battery storage at this site, therefore little to no fire risk. The array can never expand or get bigger; it is limited to the proposed size. Property Value Studies from Loyola University show that property values will not decrease due to proximity to the array. She stated that Heat Value Studies showed that ambient air temp could increase slightly, but shaded parts under the panel will not be affected.

She stated that the solar panels will not leach any toxic materials and that panels are comprised of same materials as home electric systems. Damaged panels are replaced immediately. She addressed the conversation with the farming family that owns the parcels. Working with Apex will give them a more diverse land use for these families as farming becomes less lucrative. She stated there would be no burden on local resources. She addressed where the panels are recycled after decommissioning, they are over 98% totally recyclable. The decommissioning costs are addressed and reassessed throughout the life of the project.

Residents that were not sworn in to testify asked questions about distance from nearest houses, noise levels, and what happens if or when a tornado comes through and who would pay for property damaged caused by the damaged array.

Ms. Shira responded that the distance of the beginning of the array from the property line of the nearest neighborhoods was approximately 750ft. The transformer in the center of the array makes the same amount of noise as an air conditioning unit and would not be detectable from neighboring properties.

Mr. Fronek asked that the commissioners consider gathering a public vote of the residents on the issue via referendum.

Staff Report

Ms. Williams read excerpts from the staff advisory report in the packet.

BACKGROUND

The subject property has been used as farmland and a homestead for decades. The subject property is fronted with potable water and electricity along North Somonauk Road and East North Avenue. Sanitary sewer is adjacent on the north and south sides of the subject parcels. Storm sewer exists on the easterly limit of the subject site. Roadway access is 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 & 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 multiple roadways, Pampas Drive and Prairie Street, from the Prairieview Subdivision on the south to NeuCort Subdivision on the north. Cardinal Street also currently dead ends at the northern property of the subject project.

Variance Requests:

1. **Maximum Height.** Grand Parade Solar respectfully requests that the five-utility pole line-up proposed for interconnection to ComEd's electrical grid, running parallel to N. Somonauk Road, as shown in Figure 1, 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 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."

Ms. Williams addressed the statements concerning the cost of decommissioning. She explained that the Town will hold a bond to cover the cost of the decommissioning, which is evaluated on a cycle and adjusted as needed.

Deliberations

There was a question from Ms. Steadman to the applicant regarding the variance requests, noise, leaching materials, erosion guidelines. Ms. Williams responded that the requests for variances could be accepted or rejected. Ms. Shira repeated her statements about the noise, or lack thereof of the transformer within the array. She also stated again that the panels do not leach any materials into the ground.

Ms. Torres commented that she questioned the concept of others dictating what someone does or wants to do with their personal property as long as it is lawful within the town code.

There was a question from the public about who will do maintenance of vegetation around the arrays. The applicant responded that a party would be contracted to mow the area.

Then, hearing no more questions or deliberations, Mr. Hedrick closed the Public Hearing at 8:07pm.

Review Standards/Findings of Fact

The members of the Planning Commission deliberated regarding the standards for granting a special use permit in accordance with Section 9-10-3 of the Town Code. Their findings are as follows:

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 Planning Commission concurred that:

The proposed structure or use at the particular location requested needs further clarification to determine whether it's 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.

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 Planning Commission concurred that:

The proposed structure or use will have an adverse effect upon the adjacent property and the character of the neighborhood.

The proposed structure or use will not have an adverse effect on traffic conditions, utility facilities and other matters affecting safety and general welfare.

The proposed structure's long-term effects on public health are unclear.

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 Planning Commission concurred that:

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

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.

Ms. Torres made a motion to approve the Findings of Fact, seconded by Ms. Steadman. A unanimous voice vote carried the motion.

Recommendation

Ms. Kaminski made a motion to recommend the Town Board Deny the Request for the Special Use Permit on the Subject Property with PIN 09-20-401-006 and PIN 09-20-426-002. Mr. Moser seconded the motion.

Roll Call vote

Ayes: Commissioners Moser, Hedrick, Steadman, Kaminski

Nays: Commissioner Torres

Abstain: None

Absent: Commissioner Lawson

Ms. Williams stated the recommendation would be placed on the agenda of the Regular Town Board meeting on Monday April 13, 2026 for their consideration.

Mr. Hedrick called a five-minute recess at 8:55pm

The Planning Commission reconvened at 9:01 PM. All members remain present, they are Mark Hedrick, Victoria Torres, Julie Steadman, Trent Moser, and Mariann Kaminski

PUBLIC HEARING

3. Raymond Soto of SOTOMAYN LLC, as applicant, has filed a request for text amendment in accordance with Title 9, Chapter 9, Section 2B of the Cortland Town Code. The proposed amendment consists of modifying Title 9, Chapter 2, Section 2 to define "Outdoor Storage, Commercial". The proposed amendment also includes the addition of "Outdoor Storage, Commercial" as a permitted use in C-2 General Commercial zoning as indicated in Section 9-3-7 Permitted Uses by District.

Public Hearing

Chair Hedrick opened the public hearing at 9:02pm. Deputy Town Clerk Koks read the public notice into the record. The notice was published in the *Daily Chronicle* on February 12, 2026, meeting the requirements of the law.

Chair Hedrick swore in those wishing to testify. Zoning Administrator Brandy Williams, Raymond Soto, and Robert Dawidiuk, were sworn in.

Applicant's Testimony

Robert Dawidiuk addressed the commissioners and explained the applicant is asking for a permanent zoning change to permit outdoor storage as a commercial use. They are also asking to add a definition for "Outdoor Storage-Commercial" to the existing code.

He noted that "Indoor Storage" is already defined and approved and request is only for changes to the C2 zoning district.

Mr. Dawidiuk explained the benefit to Cortland, as the applicant would bring in a new business, which increases revenue and taxes, and stated that the use is consistent with C2 zoning. This business would meet a need for storage of larger items like RV, boats, especially for residents who have issues with HOA storage guidelines. He introduced SotoMayn, LLC, a family-owned business, and he outlined the offerings in their other locations in Elburn and Big Rock. He explained the other locations are filled and they are looking to expand. Safety is their priority and they maintain a high standard for curb appeal at their facilities.

Public Testimony

There was no correspondence submitted and there was no public testimony given.

Rebuttal

There was no rebuttal from the applicant.

Public Opportunity for Further Questioning

There was none given.

Staff Report

Ms. Williams explained that this text amendment would not be specific to this property and would apply to all C2 district parcels. The current code is a bit vague, so the applicant provided a definition and proposed the change.

Deliberations

The commissioners examined the current zoning map and looked at all existing C2 properties. They asked the applicant questions about vetting process and application, local employment opportunities, security measures. The applicant responded that they do require proof of insurance and documentation to rent a spot and they are mainly staffed by family. They take security very seriously and there are plans for a camera and security system installation.

The commissioners asked for clarification on the number of storage spots and where they would be located on the property, the applicant responded that there would possibly be 120 rear spots and 40 inside.

The commissioners asked if the business had the ability to lien properties to address non-payment, and the applicant responded they do have the ability to lien. They also stated that they are under contract to buy the property and that the revenue for city would be positive for the community.

Then, hearing no more questions or deliberations, Mr. Hedrick closed the Public Hearing at 9:24pm.

Review Standards/Findings of Fact

This proposal did not require findings of fact. Approval of findings of fact is not applicable.

Recommendation

Ms. Kaminski made a motion to recommend the Town Board Approve the Request for the text amendment in accordance with Title 9, Chapter 9, Section 2B of the Cortland Town Code. Ms. Torres seconded the motion.

Roll Call vote

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

Nays: None

Abstain: None

Absent: Commissioner Lawson

Ms. Williams stated the recommendation would be placed on the agenda of the Regular Town Board meeting on Monday April 13, 2026 for their consideration.

STAFF REPORTS

Ms. Williams reported the SolarStone Project has been remanded back to the Planning Commission and will appear on the agenda at the April 2, 2026 meeting at 6:30pm. They will reopen the public hearing for that meeting to take any additional testimony before making a new recommendation to the Town Board.

REPORT OF THE CHAIR

Mr. Hedrick reported that April 12th is the Fire Department Breakfast and he also stated that he will not be in attendance in April and Brad Lawson will step in to run the meeting.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS FOR DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION

There was no unfinished business.

NEW BUSINESS FOR DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION

There was no new business.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Kaminski made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Ms. Steadman. A unanimous voice vote carried the motion.

The meeting adjourned at 9:29pm

Respectfully submitted by:

Catherine Koks, Deputy Town Clerk

DRAFT