



## Town of Cortland

### Planning Commission Meeting

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

December 04, 2025 at 7:00 PM

#### MINUTES

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#### CALL TO ORDER / PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE / ROLL CALL

Mr. Hedrick called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited. Clerk Cheryl Aldis called the roll showing as present, Commissioners Mark Hedrick, Robert Barnhart, Vicky Torres, Julie Steadman, Brad Lawson. None shown as absent. Quorum was present. Also, present was Brandy Williams, Zoning Administrator, Town Clerk Cheryl Aldis, Deputy Town Clerk Catherine Koks

#### APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Ms. Torres moved to approve the agenda as presented, seconded by Mr. Barnhart.

Voice vote carried the motion.

#### PUBLIC WISHING TO SPEAK

No public wishing to speak unrelated to the Public Hearings.

#### APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. Approve Planning Commission Minutes of July 18, 2024

Mr. Barnhart moved to approve the minutes of July 18, 2024, seconded by Ms. Steadman. 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.

Mr. Hedrick opened the public hearing at 7:04pm

Clerk Aldis read the public hearing notice into the record. The notice was published in the Daily Chronicle on November 12, 2025, meeting the requirements of the law.

#### Swearing In of Speakers

Mr. Hedrick swore in Brandy Williams, Zoning Administrator; Conner Sayles, Solar Stone Partners; Jamie Walter, Walter Farms.

#### Applicant Testimony

Connor Sayles from Solar Stone Partners, gave background on his 5-year career with the company and the company in general. The company began in Minneapolis,

Minnesota. Solar Stone Partners currently has sixteen active projects over MN and IL. They also have twenty projects they are permitting and developing for Amren and ComEd.

The proposed project involves approximately 80 acres crossing 2 parcels. It will be on a distribution grid with ComEd. The intent of these projects is to continue to farm around the array, and it would remain as an A1 use and continue to be farmed after installation of the solar farm.

He stated that annexation of the two parcels is anticipated before work can begin.

The total grid load is 7 megawatts, split into two grids, one 5 megawatts and one 2 megawatts. He stated no permit will be required from the Army Corps of Engineers and the anticipated construction start date is July 2026.

There would be a 4 mile reconductoring with ComEd as there is currently no direct line to the project.

Electrical infrastructure will be buried underground per Town Code. Each project will have its own interconnection with ComEd poles on either side of the driveway. Access Drive 18ft in width, which is up to IDOT standards. Road Use agreements will be in place when they go to submit for the Town permits.

The project will utilize single axis trackers, sensor technology and bi-facial panels. Remote monitoring and operation. Regular and as-needed maintenance will be completed. These facilities are in operation and are rated for 30+ years. None of the equipment will be over the 10ft height restriction. The only concrete planned for the facility is the transformer pad, where transformer equipment is housed. A livestock fence is planned around the perimeter of the array. There is no energy storage assigned to these projects.

He mentioned details on some legislation related to the CRGA (Clean and Reliable Affordability Act) as well as updates from the county on data center standards and the goal to have centers be self-sufficient.

### **Public Testimony**

Zoning Administrator Williams read two letters from the public:

*Brad and Candace Snow:* IL Rte. 38. The Snows wrote to strongly oppose the project and felt it was unsuitable for this rural and scenic part of Cortland. They stated they felt the solar field would devastate the rural character of the area and would be incompatible with the surrounding community. They cited noise concerns, health concerns, a decrease property values, and felt there were better suited areas to develop.

*Alex Robinson:* IL Rte. 38. Robinson wrote to oppose the project because of incompatibility with residential areas, negative impact on property values, environmental and ecological concerns, safety issues and glare, availability of more suitable locations, and lack of community input and transparency. He also mentions concerns with visual impact, and electrical equipment as a fire risk. He asked the commission for additional public hearings and studies to be completed before making a decision on the special use permit.

### **Rebuttal**

Jamie Walter, Whiskey Acres Distilling Company and owner of the subject property: Walters explained that Whiskey Acres Distilling Company is 100% run off the sun for their company operations and feels that alternative energy options like solar are an important part of decarbonization of the grid. Solar costs per watt are the cheapest and fastest sources of energy today. He is very supportive of the project. He is also sensitive to the neighbors concerns about aesthetics and explained that the array will be surrounded by crops and some landscape screening has also been planned for. Overall, they feel it will be a minimal intrusion and he stated that directly across the tracks is the wastewater treatment plant. The lease term is 25 years and two 5 year extensions.

Connor Sayles gave visual of the setbacks for the project to address the concerns with the distance buffers- approximately 700 feet.

Walter stated that noise would be minimal.

Sayles explained a vegetation screen plan would be provided along the fence line. A native plant mix/pollinator habitat would be utilized and would help with hydrology.

### **Staff Report**

Williams reviewed the advisory report as follows:

#### PROPOSAL

SolarStone Partners, as applicant, has filed with the Town of Cortland a request for a Special Use Permit (SUP) in accordance with Title 9, Chapter 10, Section 6B of the Cortland Town Code regarding the property located at Illinois Route 38, DeKalb County, Illinois. The 80.33-acre site is located north of Illinois Route 38 and south of the Union Pacific Railroad comprised of PIN 09-27-100-002 and PIN 09-27-300-004. The applicant is requesting a Special Use Permit on the subject property to, upon annexation, construct, operate, and maintain a Solar Garden as set forth in Title 9, Chapter 4, Section 34 of the Cortland Town Code. The petitioner's application is attached as Exhibit A.

The property is currently not annexed to the Town of Cortland. A joint petition for a Special Use Permit and Annexation was submitted. When a property is annexed to the Town of Cortland, the default zoning is AG, Agricultural. Because AG, Agricultural is

the applicant's desired zoning, rezoning is not requested or required. The Town Board evaluates the annexation request.

### LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION

The subject property is located east of town proper, on the north side of Illinois Route 38, south of the Union Pacific railroad, west of Airport Road. The subject property is comprised of two parcels PIN 09-27-100-002 and PIN 09-27-300-004 for a total of 80.33 acres.

The applicant intends to, upon annexation, construct, operate, and maintain a Solar Garden. Solar Gardens may be operated under a Special Use Permit in AG Agriculture of I-1 Light Industrial zoning districts. Title 9, Chapter 2 Definitions includes

**SOLAR GARDEN:** A commercial solar-electric (photovoltaic) array that provides retail electric power (or a financial proxy for retail power) to multiple households or businesses residing or located off-site from the location of the solar energy system.

*Existing and Surrounding Zoning:* The subject parcels are zoned DeKalb County A-1. Properties to the west, east and south are zoned DeKalb County A-1. The property to the north across the Union Pacific Railroad Right of Way is annexed to the Town of Cortland and zoned P-1 Recreation & Open Space.

The zoning map has been included as Exhibit B.

The 2024 Official Zoning Map can be found on the Town of Cortland website and at:

chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.cortlandil.org/uploads/dm/24901/Zoning\_Map\_2024\_Published\_in\_2025.pdf

*Existing and Surrounding Land Uses:* The subject parcels are listed by DeKalb County as farmland and used as row crop. Properties to the west, east and south across Route 38 are listed by DeKalb County as farmland and used as row crop. Immediately south, adjacent to the subject parcel is a homestead. The property to the north across the Union Pacific Railroad Right of Way is annexed to the Town of Cortland and zoned P-1 Recreation & Open Space.

### BACKGROUND

The subject property has been used as farmland for decades. The subject property is not served by water, sanitary sewer or storm sewer. Roadway access is currently by a farm entrance from Illinois Route 38.

### 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.

Note: An excerpt of the Comprehensive Plan is attached as Exhibit C. The full Comprehensive Plan can be found on the Town of Cortland's website and at:

[https://www.cortlandil.org/vertical/sites/%7B869DC155-25BA-43FB-B05D-BD63FEA0657C%7D/uploads/Cortland\\_2023\\_Comprehensive\\_Plan\\_v05\\_Final.pdf](https://www.cortlandil.org/vertical/sites/%7B869DC155-25BA-43FB-B05D-BD63FEA0657C%7D/uploads/Cortland_2023_Comprehensive_Plan_v05_Final.pdf)

### TECHNICAL REVIEW

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. Once the facility is operational and the construction traffic ceases, vehicular access will be nominal. However, because the roadway providing the site access is a state route, IDOT will need to review and approve the entrance design. A building permit will not be issued until confirmation of IDOT approval of the entrance is provided to the Town. Variances from Town Code have not been requested as part of the application. Financial obligations and surety will be in accordance with Town Code which differs from language included in the application under "Financial Framework".

Williams explained the joint petition of the annexation and special use applications. She explained the railroad is not a buffer so the annexation would be contiguous with the current town border. There are no utility adjacent to these properties. The parcels currently have a farm entrance. The town adopted a comprehensive plan in 2023 and this request coincides with this plan.

### **Questions**

Torres asked about the involvement of the County before approval by the Town. Williams explained that the State removed limitations that the County can apply. The County directs petitions to the local municipality's local planning jurisdiction. There was discussion on setbacks. Lawson asked if there were plans to expand in the future. Sayles replied that there was no further expansion planned at this time. Lawson asked about where the electricity generated would go to or be brokered by. Sayles responded that ComEd would be using energy in their substation and felt that it would be used locally (within 10-20 miles).

Lawson questioned the Town's interest in annexation. The board discussion following a comprehensive plan and what would happen if the request is denied what the repercussions would be to Cortland.

Mr. Hendrick closed the public hearing at 8:00 p.m.

### **Deliberations**

Barnhart asked about the decommissioning plan, which was included in the packet documents. Lawson stated that there is a general understanding that ComEd is the factor for these projects but would like to see guidance from the Town Board for logic related to solar projects and locations. Barnhart questioned Williams on areas of in the

comprehensive plan where renewable energy was highlighted. Clerk Aldis gave an opinion about noise and vision of a similar array.

## **Review of Standards**

### **9-10-3 Standards**

Clerk Aldis read the standards prescribed by the Town Code into the record.

**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 use of the project at this location is desirable for the use to the public. It will continue to improve the general welfare of the community.

**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 proposed structure will not have a 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.

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

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

**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.

Mr. Barnhart made a motion to approve the Standards A, B, C as read and Standard D as not applicable. Ms. Torres seconded the motion. Unanimous voice vote carried the motion.

## **Review of Conditions**

There were no conditions.

## **Recommendation**

Mr. Barnhart 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. Mr. Lawson seconded the motion.

Yeas: Commissioners Barnhart, Hedrick, Lawson, Torres, Steadman

Nays: None

Absent: None

Roll Call Vote: 5-yea, 0-nay, 0-absent, motion carried.

## **PUBLIC HEARING**

3. Town of Cortland, as the Applicant, has filed a request for text amendments in Title 4, Title 5, and Title 9 in the Cortland Town Code to allow keeping of domesticated hens.

Mr. Hedrick opened the public hearing at 8:32 p.m.

Clerk Aldis read the public hearing notice into the record. The notice was published in the Daily Chronicle on November 7, 2025, meeting the requirements of the law.

### **Swear in those wishing to testify**

Ms. Williams remains sworn from previous hearing.

### **Applicant Testimony**

Williams clarified that the planning commission is only considering text amendments under Title 9- only. The commission reviewed the proposed changes:

- Remove, "*excepting domesticated hens*" from Section 9-3-13.B.2 "Table of Permitted Yard Obstructions"
- Add a new row, "*Chicken coop with enclosed run (in accordance with Section 9-4-35 of this title)*" - permitted in Rear Yard. to Section 9-3-13.B.2 "Table of Permitted Yard Obstructions"
- Add new Subsection 9-4-35: *Chicken Coops and Enclosures* to "Supplementary Regulations for Specific Uses"
  - A. Lot: Only lots zoned and used for single-family purposes (or agricultural property) that are 11,000 square feet or larger may have hens.
  - B. Location: Coops must be in rear yards and at least twelve (12) feet from property lines and not within any easement on the subject property.
  - C. Size: A chicken coop up to one hundred and forty four (144) square feet and an enclosed outside run of at least thirty-two (32) square feet is required.

The commissioners asked Williams questions about lot size, corner lot specifications, height limitations, and visibility from the street.

### **Public Testimony**

There was no public testimony.

### **Rebuttal**

There was no rebuttal.

### **Staff Report**

There was no formal report. Williams mentioned that DeKalb County does allow chickens.

Mr. Hendrick closed the public hearing at 8:44pm

### **Deliberations**

The commission discussed size limitations and issues with sight triangles and general size limits of allowed accessory structures within Town limits. The commission asked Ms. Williams to amend the language of Item C to include "not exceeding ten feet (10') in height." before presentation to the Town Board. The commission discussed sanitation issues related to disease and up-keep/cleanliness of the areas.

### **Recommendation**

A motion was made by Mr. Barnhart to accept proposed text amendments for Title 9 with an additional height limitation of ten feet (10') on item C. of the amendment. Ms. Steadman seconded the motion.

Yea: Commissioners Barnhart, Hedrick, Torres, Steadman

Nay: Commissioner Lawson

Absent: None

Roll call vote: 4-yeas, 1-nay, 0-absent, motion carried.

### **STAFF REPORTS**

Ms. Williams stated she has three other items she's working on. She announced the January 1, 2026 is canceled due to the holiday, but the February 5, 2026 meeting will go on as scheduled.

### **REPORT OF THE CHAIR**

No report given.

### **COMMISSIONER'S REPORT**

No report given.

**LAISON REPORT**

No report given.

**UNFINISHED BUSINESS FOR DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION**

No unfinished business discussed.

**NEW BUSINESS FOR DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION**

4. Determination of January 2026 Meeting Date

The January 1, 2026 meeting date has been canceled. The next Planning Commission meeting is February 5th at 7:00 p.m.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Mr. Barnhard made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Ms. Torres.

Unanimous Voice Vote carried the motion.

The meeting adjourned at 9:02 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by:

Catherine Koks, Deputy Town Clerk