MEMO

DATE: September 24, 2020

TO: Poplar Grove Village Board

FROM: Village of Poplar Grove Planning and Zoning Commission

SUBJECT: Findings of Fact for Case 2020-05: Poplar Grove Solar, LLC, 4324 IL Route 173 (East Half)

REQUEST AND LOCATION:
The applicant, Poplar Grove Solar, PO Box 310, Highland Park, IL 60035, on behalf of the property owner, DYN 173, LLC (First Midwest Group), 6801 Spring Creek Road, Rockford, IL 61114, is requesting a special use to install non-building mounted solar collectors (total of 18 acres, eastern phase) for export of energy for use by an electrical utility at 4324 Illinois Route 173 within LI, Light Industrial District (Poplar Grove Zoning Ordinance Sections 8-6-11-B-2 and 8-5-7 Special Use). Part of PIN: 03-14-300-002. The property is rectangular in shape and is currently being farmed. The solar farm will be on the northeastern part of the property away from Illinois Route 173. There is a cluster of single family residential to the east and a farmstead to the northwest. Please note that this is the same special use that was requested in 2018 but was never constructed.

FINDINGS OF FACT:
Per Section 8-5-7(D) of the Village of Poplar Grove Zoning Ordinance, the criteria for granting a Special Use Permit are as follows:

A. **Findings: The establishment, maintenance or operation of the special use would not be detrimental to or endanger the public health, safety, morals, comfort or general welfare.**

There are many kinds of solar farms, each having their own set of environmental impacts. Solar farms can be thousands of acres in size. Some require that all vegetation be removed which impacts wildlife by loss of habitat; some are constructed on cement pads that increase surface water run-off; some radiate heat and some feed into a tower that can be dangerous for birds and insects. Phase I of the proposed solar farm will be 18 acres in size, have adequate vegetation, create minimal surface water run-off and is not anticipated to create a noticeable amount of heat or glare.

Considering the zoning of the property and the potential development that is permitted, the solar farms, with proper conditions of approval, would have less of an impact to neighboring properties. An increased setback is being utilized along the east property lines to provide an additional buffer between the projects and nearby residences. The addition of pollinating plants will benefit the community while providing a low maintenance vegetative cover rather than grass seed which can become unsightly.

B. **Findings: The special use would not be injurious to the use and enjoyment of other property in the immediate vicinity for the purposes already permitted or substantially diminish or impair property values within the neighborhood.**

Industrial and limited commercial development is already permitted. The solar farm will be required to adhere to all local, state and federal regulations in addition to the conditions of approval. The height (and potential shadow casting) and lot coverage of the solar panels are less than the amount permitted while the setbacks are greater. The amount of traffic generated by the solar farm is less than that created by an industrial or commercial development.

Although the NRI report indicated agricultural drainage tiles on the western half of the property, through the special use process, a study can be conducted on the eastern half of the property. This will ensure that any potential agricultural drainage tiles are discovered and can now be protected.

C. <u>Findings</u>: The establishment of the special use will not impede the normal or orderly development and improvements of the surrounding property for uses permitted in the district.

The solar farms are not anticipated to impact the ability of the surrounding properties to be used agriculturally. The addition of pollinators is intended to be a benefit to the agricultural community. The solar farm is not anticipated to create additional heat, odor, light or noise that would infringe on the nearby residents' enjoyment of their properties.

D. <u>Findings:</u> Adequate utilities, access roads, drainage and/or necessary facilities will be provided.

The property is located along Illinois Route 173 which can adequately handle construction equipment and increased traffic during construction. Access roads, drainage and additional power lines and power poles will be installed by the developer in accordance to the project's needs and submitted narrative and site plan.

E. <u>Findings:</u> Adequate measures have been taken to provide ingress or egress so designed as to minimize traffic congestion in the public streets.

Once construction of the special use is complete, there will be minimal traffic generated by the routine maintenance and monitoring of the site. An access road will be wide enough to handle two-way traffic, for instance, when multiple vehicles are present.

F. <u>Findings:</u> The special use shall, in all other respects, conform to the applicable regulations of the districts in which it is located.

The special use will be required to conform to all the applicable regulations of the Zoning Ordinance, the Subdivision Ordinance, all other regulations and to any conditions of approval enacted by the Village Board.

The motion to adopt the Findings of Fact for case 2020-05 for a special use to permit a solar farm at 4324 IL Route 173 (East Half) carried with a (4-0) roll call vote.

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Jessica Roberts, Chairman
Poplar Grove Planning and Zoning Commission