



PLANNING COMMISSION AGENDA REPORT

TO: St. Francis Planning Commission
FROM: Beth Richmond, Planner
SUBJECT: Solar Farm Zoning Ordinance Amendment
DATE: 4-10-2024 for 4-17-2024 meeting
APPLICANT: Connexus Energy (Brian Burandt)

OVERVIEW

The City has received a request from Connexus Energy to amend the City's Zoning Code to allow solar farms within the I-2 Isolated Industrial District. Land within this district is primarily owned and operated by Northrop Grumman for the manufacturing, storage, and testing of explosives and component parts. Land that is not actively used for this purpose is maintained as vacant land and includes wetlands, open green space, and wooded areas. Connexus Energy and Northrop Grumman desire to partner in developing solar energy on unused land located outside of the hazardous areas onsite.

REVIEW PROCEDURE

60-Day Land Use Application Review Process

Pursuant to Minnesota State Statutes Section 15.99, local government agencies are required to approve or deny land use requests within 60 days. Within the 60-day period, an automatic extension of no more than 60 days can be obtained by providing the applicant written notice containing the reason for the extension and specifying how much additional time is needed. The deadline for the land use request is May 20, 2024.

Public Hearing

City Code Section 10-31-03 requires that a public hearing for review of the zoning ordinance amendment request be held by the Planning Commission. The public hearing notice was published in the Anoka County Union Herald on April 5, 2024.

ANALYSIS

The site is currently zoned I-2 Isolated Industrial. The general intent of this district is to accommodate industrial users that, due to the nature of their operations, must be isolated from urban areas. A mix of industrial, agricultural, and utility uses are permitted in the I-2 District.

The City currently allows two types of solar system uses as principal uses: solar gardens and solar farms. These uses have the following definitions:

Community solar energy system (CSES, also called a "solar garden"): A solar-electric (photovoltaic array that provides retail electric power (or a financial proxy for retail power) to multiple community members or businesses residing or located off-site from the location of a solar energy system.

Solar farm: A commercial facility that converts sunlight into electricity, whether by photovoltaics (PV), concentrating solar thermal devices (CST) or other conversion technology, for the principal purpose of wholesale sales of generated electricity.

Community solar energy systems/solar gardens are conditionally allowed within the I-2 District today. The applicant is requesting to also allow solar farms within this district. Currently, solar farms are permitted with standards in the City’s agriculture and urban reserve zoning districts. The table below shows how both solar gardens and solar farms are allowed within the City today.

	A-1	A-2	UR	I-1	I-2
Solar garden	C	C	C	C	C
Solar farm	PS	PS	PS		

Standards for each of these uses exist in the Code today and are attached for reference. If the Planning Commission is supportive of the proposed amendment, Staff recommends that solar farms in the I-2 District be held to the same standards as solar farms in the A-1, A-2, and UR districts.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff asks the Planning Commission to hold a public hearing for the requested ordinance amendment and provide a recommendation to the City Council. The Planning Commission may choose to move forward with one of the following options:

1. Recommend approval of the amendment and allow solar farms in the I-2 District as a Permitted with Standards (PS) use, with the use standards that already exist for the A-1, A-2, and UR districts.
2. Recommend denial.

If Commissioners feel that additional information is needed to make a decision, Commissioners may table the request to the next meeting and provide direction as to the information needed from Staff and/or the applicant.

ATTACHMENTS

- Applicant narrative
- Existing solar standards