

TO: St. Francis City Council
FROM: Beth Richmond, Planner
SUBJECT: Solar Farm Zoning Ordinance Amendment – 1st Reading
DATE: May 6, 2024

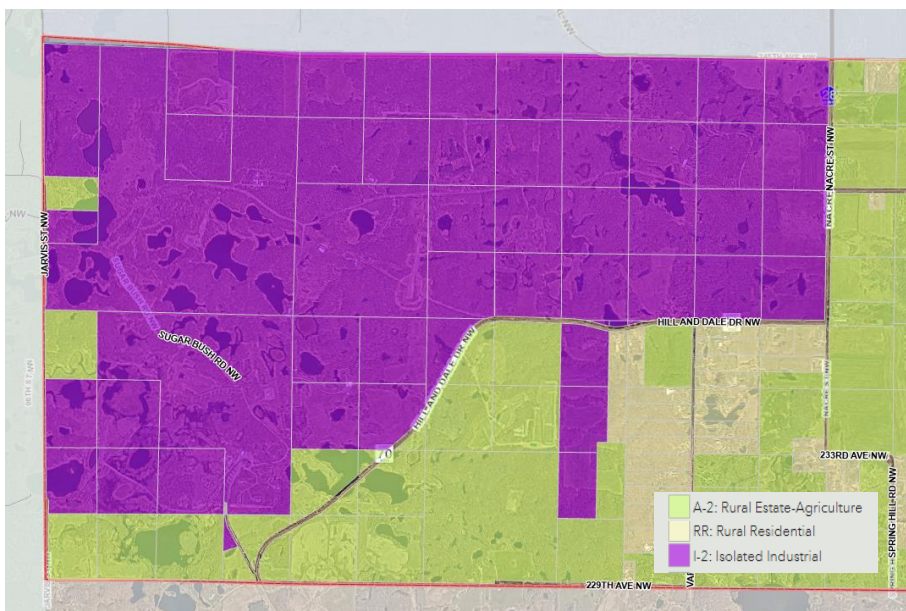
OVERVIEW:

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.

ANALYSIS

The I-2 District is located on the western edge of the City. The general intent of the I-2 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.

Zoning Map



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. Standards for solar farms exist in Section 10-67-04 of the City Code. 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		

PLANNING COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

The Planning Commission reviewed the proposed Code amendment at their meeting on April 17, 2024 and held a public hearing. No oral or written comment from the public was received. Following the public hearing, the Planning Commission unanimously voted to recommend approval of the requested amendment to allow solar farms as a Permitted with Standards use in the I-2 District. As a Permitted with Standards use, solar farms would be held to the same standards as solar farms in the A-1, A-2, and UR districts.

ACTION TO BE CONSIDERED:

Based on the Planning Commission’s unanimous recommendation for approval, a draft approval ordinance has been prepared and attached for your review.

Potential Motions:

1. Move to approve the 1st reading of Ordinance 329 amending the Zoning Code to allow solar farms as a Permitted with Standards use within the I-2 District.
2. Move to deny the amendment request to allow solar farms within the I-2 District for the following reason(s): _____ and direct Staff to prepare written findings.
3. Table the amendment request and request additional information from Staff/applicant.

ATTACHMENTS:

- Draft Ordinance 329