

ATHENS TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION

Regular Meeting
November 4, 2024

The regular meeting of the Athens Township Planning Commission was called to order on Monday, November 4, 2024 at 7:02PM by Chairwoman, Marion Carling.

Present: Chairwoman Marion Carling, Matt Cooper, Ron Reagan, Bob Petruschak, Secretary, Cindy Parrish, and Zoning Officer, Ed Reid. All others in attendance are noted on the attached sign-in sheet. Rebecca Miller was unable to attend due to a scheduling conflict.

Applicants to be heard: none

Comment on Conditional Use application for GreenKey Solar: Tracy Tackett from GreenKey Solar was in attendance to discuss their plans for a solar facility on the Ann Rosh property that abuts Ellistown Road. The Conditional Use hearing is scheduled for November 14, 2024, at 6:00PM. Tracy presented their plans and discussed project specifics. A copy of the slides from her presentation are attached. Approximately 25 acres of the 36 acre parcel will be developed as the solar facility. The project will provide enough power for 900-1100 homes. The company looks for substations that have existing capacity. They expect no increase in traffic except during construction. The inverters, transformers, and cooling fans are the only sound generators on-site, and they will be centralized on the property.

After the presentation, Planning Commission members had follow-up questions. The answers provided and the member who asked are as follows:

(Cooper): GreenKey currently operates 10-15 facilities, and the oldest has been in operation for about 12 years.

(Cooper): The average lifespan of a facility is 25-40 years.

(Cooper): Panels rarely need replacing. 6 were recently replaced at a facility due to a fire that started at the road (it was noted that the facility was NOT responsible for causing the fire).

(Cooper): When panels are damaged/removed GreenKey encourages that they be recycled, but they may end up in a landfill.

(Cooper): Pesticides might be used especially at the beginning to help with vegetative growth, but then they hope not to use them. Grazing is welcomed if they can find an available herd, but they assume that they will be contracting someone to mow the property.

(Cooper): Two property value studies have been conducted. Those studies were handed to the Commission and are included in the CU file. The studies showed zero to negligible impact on neighboring property values.

(Cooper): The property will be seeded first, then fenced, then the racking system will be installed (6-9 months overall). The greatest noise disturbance will be for about 2 weeks as the racking is installed.

(Cooper): The working hours during construction are typically 7AM-6PM, but that varies depending on the municipality and CU restrictions.

(Cooper): The traffic during construction would consist of tractor trailers and contractors. The panels will generally be delivered within the same time period. No crane will be used.

(Cooper): The panels will be fixed tilt and stationary.

(Cooper): Dust control will be done if necessary.

(Cooper): There is vegetation on the site now so they see no issue with establishing vegetation despite the parcel having been previously used for surface mining.

(Cooper): Typically, the timber area will be clear cut, but they try to avoid that if possible.

(Reagan): S1 and S2 will be developed at the same time. The project is broken in to 2 projects for utility purposes. They are allowed 3MW max at a facility but are allowed 2 facilities on a site.

(Reagan): They contract with relatively local contractors to respond to an “emergency”.

(Reagan): In case of a fire, the panel melt. They don’t burn and have little to no toxic materials.

(Reagan): If winds loosen the panels, it does not become an emergency situation, but there productivity will drop so they’ll get someone on site promptly.

(Reagan): Any fires usually start at the transformers, and there will be a kill-switch located at the first pole that the fire company would come to. The fire company will have gate access, and they are happy to do a training with the local fire company. There will be no batteries on site.

(Cooper): They do not plan to add batteries in the future, but the township could make it a condition that they can’t have batteries on site and would need to come back before the Board if they wanted to do so.

Cooper noted that plastic WILL burn so there is not NO environmental impact in the case of a fire.

(Cooper): Photos of the panels damaged in the previously discussed fire will be sent.

(Petruschak): A list of materials on the panels will be sent so members can research it themselves.

(Petruschak): They send someone out to clear the panels after a snow storm because they aren’t productive when covered.

(Petruschak): It will take 6-9 months to construct the site.

(Cooper): It will be a couple of years before they break ground.

(Reagan): It’s standard for the bond to have a clause to be reviewed periodically to account for inflation and such.

(Reagan): There will be 4 fans/inverter.

Discussion was held about road bonding during construction, the fans, and noise.

(Cooper): The existing trees are not enough to block visibility, but they will be happy to increase the screening.

(Reagan): They might need NPDES and will have to meet state utility regulations, but most of the permitting process is at the local level.

Discussion was held about how they choose sites and local regulations and determining when lines are saturated.

(Cooper): The proposed development on the New York side of the border is a different company.

Discussion was held about setbacks, buffers, and screening. Contact information will be available to the residents. The Land Development could potentially be submitted to the township in the Spring (2025).

The floor was opened to resident questions, and discussion was held about pesticides and well contamination. Tackett said it shouldn't be a concern.

Motion by Cooper, second by Reagan to comment to the Supervisors:

“No adverse comment, but request the following conditions be set:

1. No broken panels on site
2. Prohibit batteries on site
3. Set up meeting and training with the fire company
4. Ask that it be constructed/maintained without herbicides”

Motion carried.

Zoning/SALDO updates: The updates/revisions are not available yet. Discussion was briefly held about accessory dwelling units and the process to create ordinances to address them.

Minutes: Motion to approve the minutes from the October 7, 2024, meeting was made by Cooper and seconded by Reagan. Motion carried. Petruschak abstained as he was not in attendance for that meeting.

Correspondence: Correspondence was reviewed individually by the commission members and was noted on the agenda

Chairwoman Carling adjourned the meeting at 8:35PM as there was no other business before the commission.

Respectfully submitted,

Cynthia R. Parrish

Secretary