

## **Buffalo County Minutes**

**Committee/Board:** Zoning Board of Adjustment

**Date of Meeting:** July 7, 2020

**Electronic and Hardcopy Filing Date** September 29, 2020

The public hearing was called to order at 9:00 a.m. by Chairman; Dale Klopp. Ron Kazmierczak, Barry Drazkowski, and Dale Klopp were all present.

Others present for all or part of the public meeting include Mike Owecke; Zoning Administrator, Anissa Glaus; Zoning Administrative Assistant, Briar Golden; Zoning Specialist, Keith and Rita Grishek representing Big Lake Farms LLC, and Eric Udelhofen representing OneEnergy Development LLC.

The public notice for the hearing was read aloud.

**Agenda items #3 and #4** were reviewed by Mr. Klopp.

Minutes are summarized as follows.

**Applicant Presentation and Testimony.** Eric Udelhofen, agent, representing OneEnergy Development LLC and Keith and Rita Grishek of Big Lake Farms, LLC, explained they want to lease the Grisheks's land, about 25 acres in the towns of Milton and Belvidere and construct a 3-megawatt grid-intertie solar energy system. He explained that OneEnergy LLC, wants to construct a project of a 3-megawatt solar system facility with 9300, single-access tracking, fixed-tilt panels, in a 25-year contract with Riverland Energy Cooperative to sell them the electricity. Rows will run north to south with steel beams that will be driven into the ground every 25 feet and stick out of the ground about 5 feet, with panels mounted on top. Total project area is a little over 25 acres with about 22.5 acres enclosed in a fence. Agricultural deer exclusion fence that is about 8 ft tall is what will be installed. There will be a centralized pad near the road that has transformer that takes the voltage. Inverter would take direct current from the solar panels and convert it into alternating current. There is monitoring equipment as well that all sits on a 10 by 10 concrete pad. Short access road is needed for the concrete pad. Shape of the project site will avoid flood plains and leave the rest of the field to be farmed and accessible. After construction they will seed the ground down to stabilize the soil and keep the weeds down. Remote monitoring to check on issues and vegetation management for mowing. No other ongoing maintenance required on project. After 25 years Riverland can choose to renew the contract or buy the solar facility or OneEnergy can renew for 10 years and continue operating. The Solar Panels have a 25-year warranty.

Dale Klopp has photo request for Mr. Udelhofen to see what similar projects he has constructed look like and what they all consist of.

### **Photo Presentation**

Mr. Udelhofen explains pictures from project in Arcadia, and what can be expected from the solar panel system and what ground cover will look like along with transformer and other

electrical equipment, concrete pad, and gravel access driveway. Plans to start in April or May 2021 and to be completed by October.

Mike Owecke explains that in the pictures you can see where the flood plain is and that the configuration of the system avoids the 100-year flood plain.

Mr. Owecke questions if they are tracking and how they respond to the angle of the sun. Mr. Udelhofen responds that they are programmed and will automatically move and tilt with the sun movement.

Mr. Klopp questions how deep the beams are that are driven into the ground. Mr. Udelhofen responds that they are roughly 12-14 feet deep in the ground depending on the soil. Equipment used will be small, besides for excavator to dig foundation for the electrical pad.

**There were no public comments.**

**Questions to the Applicants and Agent by the Board of Adjustment Members and the Zoning Staff**

Mr. Kazmierczak had two questions that were weather related. Number one, how are the solar panels impacted by the hail, and second how are they as far as wind shear.

Mr. Udelhofen responded that they are remarkably resilient to hail. The manufacturers of these panels, Canadian Solar, on their website, have testing regimen photos, and show them being shot with softball size hail at close range, to show that the panels don't break. To give more depth, Mr. Udelhofen explained that he used to work for a contractor that would install solar panels, and had installed 15,000 panels and had taken in 4 panels total that had hail damage, and what happened is a large hail stone hit the side and dented the aluminum frame and just sent tiny fractures through it. These panels are just two layers of tempered glass like a windshield, designed to be strong and may splinter, but will stay in place. Eric also explained that for the state electrical permit they must show evidence that they are designed to state building standards which is why they go into the ground as far as they do, to protect them from the wind.

Mr. Drazkowski questioned that Mr. Udelhofen mentioned Riverland power is an underground three phase and questioned if the facility will connect underground. Mr. Udelhofen responded that it does connect underground with an airbrake switch which allows the utility company to come and shut the system down if there is maintenance needed. Barry questioned if the airbrake switch was a safety breaker, so if Riverland is doing something or there is an outage, that switch can be pulled to take the power off the line. He also said the inverters will shut down within two seconds of a power outage as part of how they get an electrical permit, as a second measure of security, Riverland has access to a pad that they can access at any time in the event that they would need to do any maintenance, and the local fire department is also aware of where the switch is.

Mr. Drazkowski questioned about Mr. Udelhofen mentioning that there is a 25-year contract with a potential for a ten year follow on, and you mentioned that the panels have a 25-year

warranty, with a probable life of 35 years based on usages. What happens after 35 years? Is this something that someone now must clean up?

Mr. Udelhofen explained that his lease states they are obligated to remove the facility if the facility stops operating for any period. They are obligated to remove it and get the land back ready to farm at any time during the lease period or at the end of the period. At any time, the landowners can request to see that they have funds set aside to cover the decommissioning, to protect the Grishek's and the county.

Mr. Owecke asked if Mr. Udelhofen read the staff report and asked if he had issues with the suggested conditions from the zoning department, which Mr. Udelhofen agreed with the conditions.

Mr. Kazmierczak questioned the noise that will come from the panels. Mr. Udelhofen said when you are standing right next to the inverters you can hear those humming which is like a transformer. Mr. Kazmierczak then questioned how loud with a series of them there? To which Mr. Udelhofen responded If you are right next to them you can hear them, but you can't hear them at all with wind or leaves. At 500 feet distance from the panels, they can't be heard at all.

Mr. Klopp questioned about the new driveway approach and if the town board has ordinances on the driveway and if it was brought up at the town meeting. Can you just put it in wherever you want? Owner Keith Grishek says he accesses the land at two spots currently, but they already have a driveway access to the property.

Mr. Klopp asked how they handle snow removal on the panels and if someone has to come and remove it or if it just melts off.

Mr. Udelhofen responded that the panels in the morning are tilted at 60 degrees and it is black glass, as soon as there is any sunlight it heats up and sheds the snow. When weather conditions are really cold, they tend to not produce much energy anyways, so it doesn't pay to have the snow removed.

Photos from Mike Owecke of the site show the stretch of road and the fields where the solar panel system will be located. Will not be a highly visible system due to slopes.

Mr. Kazmierczak wanted to know if there was going to be any signage explain what it is and how much it generates so people can know what it is and why it is there.

Motion by Mr. Kazmierczak, seconded by Mr. Drazkowski to approve the Conditional Use Permit #2020-1 for OneEnergy Development and Big Lake Farm LLC, under the conditions that they put up signage for people passing by the development area to read what the project is and what it does as well as comply with the conditions the Zoning Department included in their paperwork. All in Favor. Carried.

Minutes from the May 28, 2020 hearing, no changes or comments. Motion to approve by Mr. Kazmierczak seconded by Mr. Drazkowski. All in Favor. Carried.

**Adjournment:** Motion by Mr. Klopp, seconded by Mr. Kazmierczak to adjourn. All in favor carried. The public hearing of the Board of Adjustment was adjourned at 10:08 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Anissa Glaus, Zoning Administrative Assistant