



Special Town Board Meeting
6:00 p.m.
Tuesday, February 9, 2021
12165 Hancock Street

Attending

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Township Chair Brian Kolbinger | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Township Supervisor Joe Danielson |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Township Supervisor Robin Boros | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Township Clerk Lucinda Messman |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Township Supervisor Luke Babler | |

Absent Members: Township Vice Chair Brad Wilkening, Township Treasurer Tanya Danielson, Township Deputy Clerk Fran Seeley

Other in person attendees: none in person; **Zoom Attendees:** Ben Wikstrom – Township Planner, Kelli Bourgeois – Township Attorney, Gary (?), Sherco Solar Project staff: William Risse -National Grid Renewables – local level coordination and permitting specialist; Aaron Brixius – Xcel Energy – Project Manager for Sherco Site transformation and Economic Development of the area; Ellen Heine – Xcel Energy – land sites group; Jordan Burmeister – National Grid Renewables – Development & Market lead for this area. Start to Construction Coordination; Mark Osendorf – Xcel Energy – Community Relationship Manager based in St Cloud.

Tuesday, April 7, 2020 The Becker Town Board passed Resolution 2020-15: A Resolution Establishing the Ability Conduct Open Meetings by Telephone. The Town Board of Becker Township, Sherburne County, Minnesota, will utilize teleconferencing as requested so long as a health pandemic exists or a peacetime emergency is declared under Minn. Stat. Ch. 12. This meeting was held both in person and utilizing a remote system.

Meeting called to order at 6:02 pm. Quorum verified by Chair Kolbinger and turned the floor over to William Risse.

Representatives for the Sherco Solar Project were in attendance via zoom to present an overview of the project and answer questions for the Town Board Supervisors.

William Risse, National Grid Renewables (formerly Geronimo Energy) led the high level detail presentation. A copy was not given to township due to zoom type meeting. It may be seen on the MP4 recording of the meeting (start at 28:48).

Sherco Solar: The What, How and Why of the Sherco Solar Project February 2020

- This is a joint effort between NG Renewables and Xcel Energy
- Introductions were made
- Site development process reviewed – history of Geronimo Energy
- NG Renewables work with permitting/get things set up and then transfer the project over to Xcel Energy

- Mark Osendorf presented Xcel Energy goals. Sherco Solar piece is an integrated resource plan
 - All four coal plants in Minnesota are scheduled to close. 3 in Becker and 1 in Oak Park Heights (retire 2028). Unit 1 to retire in 2023, Unit 2 retires in 2026 and Unit 3 retires in 2030. No more coal generation in MN by 2030.
 - Need to have 3500 MN Solar by 2030 (can power almost 775,000 homes for a year) and complete the largest-ever wind expansion by 2022. Natural Gas (combined cycle gas plant) by 2026.
 - Need to increase wind quite a bit – several projects in the works now
 - Combined Cycle Natural Gas plant online in 2026 to bridge gap
 - Since 2005, decreased carbon by 25%
 - Start process to gain regulatory approval to run the carbon-free Nuclear plant until at least 2040
 - Aggressive Goal: Carbon free by 2050. This will require some technology development that does not exist at this time. Use natural gas-fired plants in coming years as a cleaner source of electricity and continue to add renewable energy.
- Risse: Due to decommissioning
 - Why this location?
 - Decommissioning of coal plant = availability at site
 - Locations are close to the infrastructure that currently exists
 - Landowners have flat ground by the Mississippi is a good spot for solar and are willing to support this project
 - Solar resource of 3.5 kWh/m² (from slide).
 - Components
 - Three types of panels shown. By-facial solar panel will take in light on both sides. Thin Film and Polycrystalline (more traditional). No decision on type to be used for this location yet
 - Types of racking systems viewed – no decision on type just yet. Tracking type systems: a dual panel racking system and a single panel racking system.
 - Panels route the energy to inverters which convert electricity from DC to AC to send to collector substations. Underground collection lines from the inverters to the collector substations.
 - Site access, roads will be required/installed throughout the project site to service their projects
 - Collector Substation image viewed
- Aaron Brixius: Project details and benefits
 - Operation capacity 460 MW – land available for 600 MW. Additional land will be a future project. 460 MW = 3,400 acres
 - Largest project in state by factor of 4
 - Expected on line 2024 – phased construction
 - NG Renewables developing project, Xcel Energy Construction
 - Development ends at permitting
 - Xcel purchases equipment and hires contractor to make the final construction happen.
 - Projected tax revenue of \$25 million over 25 years – 80% to county

- New income for the landowner in this case
 - Discussion of the map forwarded to the board.
 - Solar project
 - No pressure on local services
 - Pollinator habitat program and reseeded the area to reduce erosion/runoff.
 - No air or water emissions
 - No order/minimal sound
 - No pollutants or negative health impacts
 - Plant with native species
- Risse – chart showing who has permitting authority. Stated that local authority has been pre-empted by the State permit in accordance with MN § 216E.10, Subd 1
 - Size of this and multiple municipalities = no need for local permits for this project. Anything over 50 MW does not need to follow local permitting unless the PUC says otherwise for solar. They did see the letter from planning noting zoning jurisdiction.
 - They want to be respectful of local planning considerations
 - Have read our ordinances and incorporated structure setbacks and such
 - The area is AG Zoning at this point
 - Other side of project – transmission line goes through AG and temporary staging during construction
 - Any expansion of wind systems greater than 5 MW
 - All other listings (Solar projects less than 50 MW, Wind projects 5 MW + unless expansion of wind project greater than 5MW) are subject to local permitting.
 - State permitting process shown (attached image from slide)
 - Goal – minimization of impacts, human and environmental
- They are looking for feedback from the Township this evening.

Question/Answers

- Mentioned positive feedback from the community. Who have you spoken with as we hadn't heard of this until now.
 - A: engaging on the west side of the project. Letters of support from Clearlake Township and Letter of Clear Lake and landowners through door knocking efforts. Feel much of area has given general support. Want to continue to correspond with the township
- Why is Xcel not using their current land around the plant?
 - Part of plan/discussion with City/County is bringing additional tax base and jobs into area. Want to use buffer property to bring in jobs – Northern Metals, Liberty Paper expansion, Google, other conversations to have certified industrial sites ready to bring jobs to the area.
- Behind coal plant, there are waste holes and ash dump – can that stuff be covered with solar systems?
 - There are issues with that. Capped landfills required to do. Planning post-pile construction. This won't work in this instance and it would be more expensive to place solar on top of a capped landfill.
- Screening?

- Anticipate chain link around the project – trees also for some parts. Depends on the costs. Will do some targeted screening.
 - Feel the panels will blend into background over time
- What is life cycle of the panels?
 - Typically warranted for 25 years. Hoping to get 35-40 years out of the panels
- After this time, who removes panels/decommissions?
 - Xcel has to submit full decommissioning plan with permit
- Will this material go to landfill or what happens?
 - Significant amount is recyclable, some will end up in landfill at this point. Example from First Solar from Ohio referenced – 90% of their panels recyclable
 - SVIA – international solar organization with efforts to further enhance recycling programs for panels.
- Xcel as good neighbor, what is plan for the ash ponds and ash piles? Are these to be reclaimed/area to be restored? Curious if good for community to get rid of coal and put in solar, what about the waste dump that exists now? Is this area now going to be pushed on our community to figure out what to do with these by-products of coal? While this may not be your area for this discussion, this is something this community talks about. We see the mess now, are these items to be left for our kids to figure out?
 - Aaron and Mark will do some follow up on these items. We agree technology does change that is why we finance and commit up front to the decommissioning plan.
 - They do still sell some of the ash that is made into blocks.
 - Other ponds have to be evaporated, filled, capped and closed. They are lined with a clay liner and geo-synthetic membrane to protect the water. Then seed and plant over top.
 - There are efforts in other landfills about mining the ash for some precious metal reclaiming (Red Wing mentioned) – there are new technologies needed to deal with these. State/Federal regulations exist as far as what can or cannot happen with the ash landfill. Gave the methane from landfill example
- Risse – not claiming perfect technology. Looking at prices of electricity and things are trending towards solar. Electricity sources are needed. Continue to progress in future with more/other options. Decommissioning details – emphasize that funds will be set aside prior to facility operation. Everything can be removed and land can go back to agriculture after decommissioning. All infrastructure can be removed.
- NE Corner, our industrial/commercial area – can we work with you to get a road connection there? It is kind of landlocked in that area. Want to work with getting something set up so we don't end up locked up in this area.
 - Yes, Township will send plans Xcel – want to work with communities
- Landowner protections regarding leases. Is that a one year lease or 25 year lease?
 - Generally they are 25 year leases with options for 5 year extensions.
- What protections do landowners have? Do they fall under the decommissioning?
 - It is under the leases – they are covered under their agreements. Generally landowners are well represented – protecting both interests in both sides.
- Concern is that landowners are protected/course of action if they have issues? Do they have a recourse?

- Jordan: leases do have clauses to cover decommissioning. Decommissioning in the permit is the ground work for these.
- Is there any scenario where solar would be removed and landowners are left with 15 years of not being able to use their land? Ex: if no longer economical for solar after 20 years, is there protection for the landowner to be sure that they haven't lost use of their land?
 - If under lease, they still get payments, but if no solar on the land, they can use the land likely. Hypotheticals are difficult discuss. Long term, we have commitments to the landowners.
- What type of yield is 460 MW? Curious how this compares to other technologies. What are wind numbers?
 - 5.67 Acres/MW
 - Sherco output – Units 1 and 2 are 750 MW. Unit 3 is 900 MW
 - 1 turbine is about 5-6 MW Footprint of these hasn't changed much. 1-1.5 acres each
- Tax base – how is this changing?
 - From farming to Commercial 3 Ag if > 1 MW
 - Tax may increase by as much as 3x per acre
 - Real Property Tax
 - Energy Production Tax
 - Taxes are based on MW Hours (1.2/MW hour) – 80% county, 20% twp
- Does the Township have any say in screening?
 - No, but we are considering the township ordinances. We do want to see some in areas people are seeing. Planning to move cedar trees that are currently on the property will be moved if possible.
- Planning Side – one of the PID's does not match. Asking as Vonco just did a major expansion permit, then this arrives the next week. What is shown on the map is accurate.
 - Risse said will update. All land in this application is RD Offutt land. He will send an updated list to us.

Chair Kolbinger thanked everyone for attendance and answering questions. William Risse and Ben Wikstrom are in communication so we are in good shape.

Road corridor – how do we do this/who correspond with? Additional information – do we coordinate with Ben or Lucinda? Communication for roads to be facilitated through Lucinda.

Zoom portion of meeting ended.

Township supervisor's consensus for Road Supervisor to request and obtain an exhibit from our engineer showing the options we have on file for the area that can be forwarded to NG Renewables and Xcel energy.

Meeting adjourned at 7:21 p.m.



Brian Kolbinger, Chair



Lucinda Messman, Clerk