

PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES
MONDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2024

The North Chicago Planning & Zoning Commission met on Monday, October 28, 2024, at 6:09 P.M. at 1850 Lewis Avenue in Council Chambers.

I. Call to Order/Attendance

Present: Paula Carballido, Angelica Douglass, Antonio Jackson (Chairman), GeanNell Jackson, Renee Jones

Staff Present: Taylor Wegrzyn, Director of Economic and Community Development; Howard Coppari, Associate Planner

II. Approval of Meeting Minutes

Meeting Minutes for July 8, 2024

Motion by P. Carballido, seconded by A. Douglass, to approve Meeting Minutes for July 8, 2024

Ayes: P. Carballido, A. Douglass, A. Jackson, G. Jackson, R. Jones (5-0)

Nays:

Abstain:

Absent:

III. Old Business

Chairman Antonio Jackson asked Taylor Wegrzyn, the Director of Economic and Community Development, about the status on bringing in new Planning & Zoning Commission (PZC) commissioners. Mr. Wegrzyn replied that he and the senior administration is working on this matter, and hopefully one new member may be appointed soon.

IV. New Business

PZC2024-05 / No Address Needed / AC Power, LLC / Solar Text Amendment
Opening of the Hearing

Motion by P. Carballido, seconded by A. Douglass to open the hearing for a solar text amendment.

Ayes: P. Carballido, A. Douglass, A. Jackson, G. Jackson, R. Jones (5-0)

Nays:

Abstain:

Absent:

Chairman Antonio Jackson opened the hearing for a solar text amendment, and he mentioned that no green cards (i.e., the certified mail receipts) were needed for this application because it was a text amendment, and the noticing process is a little different for such an application.

Chairman Jackson motioned to the applicant to appear before the podium, and then, swore in Mr. Bill Trimarchi, the Director of Project Management for AC Power, LLC.

Mr. Trimarchi introduced himself to the PZC, spoke about the company that he works for, and the reason that a solar text amendment was needed. He explained that his company would like to develop a commercial solar energy system (i.e., a solar farm) in the City of North Chicago. However, for this to happen, a text amendment is first needed, which is the reason his company is proposing a new text amendment for solar development.

Basically, AC Power is a company that specializes in developing previously disturbed sites as closed landfills, brownfields, sand and gravel pits, quarries, and former coal mines by transforming them into productive solar photovoltaic facilities.

Mr. Trimarchi explained that his text amendment was originally focused on solar energy systems and battery energy storage systems, but the city, especially Taylor Wegrzyn and Howard Coppari, the associate planner, participated and expanded upon the text amendment to include residential homes and small businesses into the text amendment.

For the City of North Chicago, this was about making a text amendment that was more equitable and expansive that benefits multiple stakeholders within the city. Because of this action, the text amendment took much longer to create and bring forward to the PZC.

Then, Chairman Jackson motioned to Mr. Coppari, if he wanted to present the city's findings on this text amendment with the aide of a PowerPoint presentation, which Mr. Coppari abided.

Mr. Coppari explained in great detail the essence of the text amendment, and the proposed ordinance was further expanded upon to benefit multiple people,

businesses, and stakeholders. The main purpose of the PowerPoint presentation was to discuss and illustrate how the text amendment would work, how it would be enforced upon, and who would benefit from this ordinance.

Originally, AC Power drafted a text amendment that focused only for the review and approval of a special use for either a commercial solar energy system or battery energy storage system. They also included a comprehensive checklist, which had to be met, before a special use can be approved. In general, the text amendment was developed mostly in a commercial setting.

After careful review, staff expanded the proposed text amendment to include the installation of solar arrays in a residential and commercial setting, which can be roof-mounted, flush-mounted, and ground-mounted as an accessory use. Such solar uses can be attached to a principal and/or accessory building(s) or laid out as a ground-mounted system as a permitted use. This would allow for a homeowner or local business owner to install a small network of solar arrays on his or her property.

After Howard's presentation concluded, Chairman Jackson opened the floor to the rest of the PZC commissioners to comment and ask questions about the proposed text amendment. This led to a good series of questions and answers that were discussed.

For example, Commissioner GeanNell Jackson asked if a home renter would benefit from such an ordinance, especially in the reduction of an electrical bill, which Mr. Trimarchi answered, "Yes." Mr. Trimarchi explained that his company was working with the State of Illinois in a program called "Illinois Shines," which benefits Illinois residents with a new source of renewable electricity, but also reduces the cost of electrical bills for low-to-moderate income people. To participate in this program, a person would purchase electricity, which is produced by solar power, directly from ComEd and participate in the cost savings, which may be between 10% to 15%.

Commissioner Angelica Douglass, Renee Jones, and Chairman Jackson also asked similar questions in regard how the state program works and who benefits from it.

Mr. Trimarchi answered their questions accordingly, and he explained that Illinois Shines benefits local homeowners or small business owners alike who erect solar panels or arrays, but also low-to-moderate income tenants and renters gain in paying less for renewable energy, which helps North Chicagoans and the surrounding communities.

Bill Trimarchi also reiterated to Chairman Jackson's question if this program locks a person into a long-term contract that is hard to break, which Mr. Trimarchi answered,

“No.” Mr. Trimarchi implored that this program is an adjustable program (basically, a contract is not needed), which is handled by ComEd with a 10% to 15% reduction in electrical cost. It serves everybody who wants to buy electricity produced by solar power.

Chairman Jackson asked for additional clarification on the difference between solar energy systems and battery energy storage systems. Do you need both uses or only one? Mr. Trimarchi responded that it depends on the entity that will erect a solar farm. For example, AC Power will only construct a solar energy system without a battery energy storage system. In this case, as he explained, solar energy will be directly fed into the electrical power grid system, but AC Power chose to include the battery energy storage system language into the text amendment in case another company may want erect that particular use separately or in combination with solar arrays.

Commissioner Jones asked, “Why in North Chicago?” Mr. Trimarchi responded that have a contract to purchase a Republic Services property, which is located in North Chicago.

Republic Services, Inc. is a North American waste disposal company whose services include non-hazardous solid waste collection, waste transfer, waste disposal, recycling, and energy services. Basically, AC Power would use their property to erect a solar farm.

Commissioner GeanNell Jackson asked about the environmental benefits of a solar energy system. Her curiosity dealt specifically with site drainage and the greening of the overall property. Mr. Trimarchi responded that developing on a former landfill site would be a positive for the entire community, and the solar arrays would not impact in a negative manner the drainage of the property.

Mr. Coppari also added that the applicant would need to submit a landscaping plan on how the overall property would be improved upon. The landscaping plan would need to mimic the Pollinator-Friendly Solar Site Act and/or Agricultural Impact Mitigation Agreement (AIMA) landscaping requirements.

Ms. Jackson’s question allowed for Mr. Coppari to transition into the thorough review of the proposed text amendment, and to go over the new changes proposed in red ink with the PZC commissioners. Mr. Coppari explained the new changes that this text amendment would have with the overall zoning ordinances.

Chairman Jackson asked the public audience if anyone had comments or questions associated with this case. Seeing and hearing from nobody from the public audience;

the chairman suggested to close the case and offer a vote count.

Mr. Coppari read the findings of fact into the record, and discussed his motion, per his staff report, to approve the text amendment without any special conditions.

Approval of the Text Amendment

Motion by P. Carballido, seconded by R. Jones to recommend the approval of a text amendment, especially its standards and regulations for solar energy systems and battery energy storage systems, and to include amendments to Article 2, Article 4, and Article 5 of the North Chicago Zoning Ordinance.

Ayes: P. Carballido, A. Douglass, A. Jackson, G. Jackson, R. Jones (5-0)

Nays:

Abstain:

Absent:

Closing of the Hearing

Motion by P. Carballido, seconded by R. Jones to recommend the closing of the hearing to the general public.

Ayes: P. Carballido, A. Douglass, A. Jackson, G. Jackson, R. Jones (5-0)

Nays:

Abstain:

Absent:

V. Questions and Comments

None

VI. Public Commentary

Taylor Wegrzyn, the Director of Economic and Community Development, spoke about updates with the department, especially on two text amendment updates, in regard to temporary signage and food trucks. Mr. Wegrzyn mentioned the two text amendments will not be reviewed by the PZC because they are located within the city's Code of Ordinances, but he wanted to inform the group that this is progressing along in a timely manner. This was a courtesy by ECD.

Other items were also discussed by the PZC and Mr. Wegrzyn that dealt with future zoning entitlement applications that will appear before the PZC in the foreseeable future and the latest news on businesses within the city.

VII. Adjournment

Motion by P. Carballido, seconded by A. Douglass to adjourn the PZC meeting.

Ayes: P. Carballido, A. Douglass, A. Jackson, G. Jackson, R. Jones (5-0)

Nays:

Abstain:

Absent:

The meeting adjourned at 8:02 P.M.