

Howe Township
January 10, 2023

The Howe Township Board of Supervisors public hearing to take public comment on the Conditional Use application submitted by Solar Renewable Energy, LLC was called to order at 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, January 10, 2023 at the Hope Eternal Church, 2 Burd Rd, Newport, PA. Present: Chairman Dale Beaver, Vice Chairman Charles Burd, Supervisor Kathy Donahey, Secretary/Treasurer Nancy Cangioli, Solicitor David Jones, Zoning Officer Makenzie Stover-CK COG, Joe Burget Jr-Burget and Associates, Doug Berry-Solar Renewable Energy. Residents: Gilbert Little, Joanne Johnston, Juanita Zeigler.

Chairman Beaver called the meeting to order with the pledge of allegiance.

Secretary Cangioli called the roll. All Supervisors were present.

Solicitor Jones stated the hearing has been properly advertised and the property was properly posted. Supervisor Donahey read for the record the following Planning Commission meeting minutes from November 28, 2022: The project proposes 3,000 free standing solar panel units on 5 acres of property located along Shortcut Rd which would be solely owned and operated by SRE and contracted and regulated through PPL Electric Utilities and the PUC. These units produce 1,400 kilowatts of electric power. Enough to service power for approximately 200 homes. The lifespan of an individual unit spans about 30 years. Concern was expressed by planning committee members regarding long term viability of SRE and how that would affect this venture. Motion was made by Eric Horting, seconded by Jamie McHenry to approve this Conditional Use Application to be forwarded to the Supervisors for consideration. Motion passed.

Supervisor Burd is an adjacent property owner to this property and has a vested interest in the outcome of this hearing. Supervisor Burd recused himself and will submit a memorandum for the reasons of recusing himself. Chairman Beaver and Supervisor Donahey will be making the decision. A decision needs to be made in 45 days.

Joe Burget and Doug Berry will be testifying and were sworn in by Solicitor Jones.

Doug Berry stated they have been in business for 13 years, it is a family-owned business, they have 15 employees and subcontractors. They have done about 350 solar projects. He provided a handout depicting pictures of some of the projects they have done through out Pennsylvania and New Jersey with descriptions of these projects. They do maintenance on the site once in the spring. They are capable of monitoring the system every 15 minutes for alerts. They plant low no mow grass to keep mowing down to 2 or 3 times a year.

Solicitor Jones- Is this a fixed system or tracking system? Doug Berry-This is a fixed system. There are no substations and they stay at 3 megawatts.

Solicitor Jones-Where does the power go? Doug Berry-It goes directly into the PPL grid underground to a pole and has to be 3 phase. PPL will determine where the pole goes.

Solicitor Jones-Is the arrangement a purchase or lease? Doug Berry-They are purchasing the property.

Solicitor Jones-In other communities or projects have they posted bonding or anything for removal at the end of life? Doug Berry-No, most feel if the property is being purchased, the investment is covering that.

Solicitor Jones-Employees visit about once every spring and then as needed per monitoring? Doug Berry-Yes and they would mow 2 to 3 times a year.

Solicitor Jones-They would have a pickup truck? Doug Berry-No they would have a van with parts etc. and would have a traditional mower.

Solicitor Jones-Do the inverters create a sound associated with them? Doug Berry-They have single phase and the boxes are smaller, they are mounted to the racking system. You will not hear them 3' to 4' away from them.

Solicitor Jones-What is the construction time from start to finish if this approved? Doug Berry-4 to 6 weeks approximately.

Solicitor Jones-You are proposing a high tension versus chain link fencing? Doug Berry-That is their encouragement if the township allows it.

Solicitor Jones-Have you had fire issues come up in the past and do you work with the local fire companies to create safety procedures? Doug Berry-Yes, they do. There is a switch on the pole that can be flipped to cut power. There would be a lock box that the fire company can access to shut off the power.

Joe Burget presented a draft of the overall plan. The property is on 5 acres on Shortcut Rd and is under contract with Doug Berry. According to the Zoning Ordinance it is zoned Village Center, is a renewable energy source and is permitted under Conditional Use. A HOP permit is required from PennDot. It is a vacant field right now and will have a very low environmental impact. A land development plan will be submitted and all the requirements will be met. Everyone in that area using electric will be utilizing the energy from this project because it is merged in with the public utility. They will remove panels as needed to meet the Stormwater requirements.

Chairman Beaver-When you are accessing the site, do you have adequate space in the buffer to get the equipment in and out without encroaching on the adjacent property owners, how are you going to navigate through the array? Joe Burget-There will a gate and a fence and they will just go around and do their maintenance in the grass. Doug Berry-They have a drone that will go back and forth to do inspections.

Chairman Beaver-The life of the panels is 30 years? Doug Berry-Yes, 30-year warranty.

Chairman Beaver-What happens in 10 years say if they go bankrupt or has to be decommissioned, would they consider posting a bond? Doug Berry-Sure if they have to but that is why they are making an investment in the land and it would more than cover the cost.

Chairman Beaver-Is there any type of protocol to deal with acts of terrorism? Doug Berry-There is the main switch to turn off the power and insurance would cover the damage.

Chairman Beaver-Have you ever had any incidents of that at your projects? Doug Berry-They have had a couple panels damaged. Signs seem to be enough and you have to have special tool to remove the panels.

Chairman Beaver-How many jobs will this project generate for Howe Township? Doug Berry-Just someone to mow the grass but no permanent employees here.

Chairman Beaver-You would be a customer of PPL? Doug Berry-Yes.

Chairman Beaver-Is the electric generated exclusive to the residents and businesses of Howe Township? Doug Berry-It goes into the grid and he believes it would be used by the local businesses and residents.

Supervisor Donahey-How much tax revenue does Howe Township get from this project? Doug Berry-It is not enrolled in clean and green so they would pay real estate tax.

Supervisor Donahey-Will there be an inverter behind every panel and making noise? Doug Berry-No, they are plastic encased and he has not heard them. Joe Burget-They did decibel readings for Muncy Creek Township and at 3 meters (10') it's like a conversation and at 25' it's like a whisper.

Supervisor Donahey-Will the panels be facing Shortcut or away and can see all the posts? Joe Burget-You will see the backside of the panels. They are willing to put in buffers.

Supervisor Donahey-You are an LLC correct and things happen and your company could go bankrupt and what happens to the township's responsibility to the project? Doug Berry-You would have the land. Solicitor Jones-Because they own it, they have a responsibility to maintain it.

Chairman Beaver-Do you have an end-of-life plan to replace panels? Doug Berry-The panels are supposed to last 40 years, they may have to replace a panel or two. That is why they monitor them.

Solicitor Jones-Question for the zoning Officer Makenzie Stover-They are showing a 10' buffer to Mr. Burd's property that is residential and is agriculture in nature can they be required to provide an additional 10'? Makenzie Stover-Yes, it would need to apply.

Juanita Zeigler-Will they be selling the electric to other people and will people get a discount on their electric? Doug Berry-No they will not and there is no discount, it will stay in the township. They just generate the electric that goes to PPL.

Chuck Burd-Somewhere in the 3rd row of the panels there is significant water ponding when it rains. It is a concern now and with more impervious coverage will it be worse? Joe Burget-The land development plan will have to resolve the issue.

Chairman Beaver called an executive session for Wednesday, January 25, 2023 at 5:30 at the Buffalo building with Solicitor Jones. A decision will be announced at the February 2, 2023 business meeting.

Chairman Beaver adjourned the hearing at 6:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Nancy Cangioli
Secretary