

**MINUTES  
CITY OF AMES  
PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION**

Date: July 15, 2009	Norman Cloud	2010
	*Keith Barnes, Chairperson	2010
Call to Order: 6:08 p.m.	Kori Heuss, Vice-Chairperson	2011
	*Jeff Johnson	2011
Place: Ames City Hall	Justin Platts	2012
Council Chambers	Chuck Jons	2012
	Elizabeth Beck	2012
Adjournment: 8:05 p.m.		
	*Absent	

**MAJOR TOPICS DISCUSSED:**

1. Discussion of Possible Language for Solar and Window Energy Systems
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CALL TO ORDER: Kori Heuss, Vice-Chairperson, called the meeting to order at 6:08 p.m.

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA:**

MOTION: (BECK/PLATTS) to approve the Agenda for the meeting of July 15, 2009.

MOTION PASSED: 5-0

**APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF JULY 1, 2009:**

MOTION: (PLATTS/BECK) to approve the Minutes of the meeting of July 1, 2009.

MOTION PASSED: 5-0

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**PUBLIC FORUM:** There were no public comments.

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**Discussion of Possible Language for Solar and Wind Energy Systems**

Sam Perry, Planner, explained that tonight will be a discussion of the proposed language for solar and wind energy systems before requesting that the Commission forward a formal recommendation to the City Council for consideration of draft code language.

Steve Osguthorpe, Director, further explained that the Council is anxious to see what we are coming up with on this issue, and have committed to meet with them in August on this topic. He said this meeting gives the Commission the opportunity to work on the concept, without getting too bogged down in the details. He explained that the goal is to get more of the conceptual approach worked out, which will then be presented to the Council. If the Council likes the general approach, they will direct staff to work up the more specific code language that will come back to the Commission for a recommendation to Council.

The Commission asked the following questions and/or made the following comments during the discussion:

- Much of the language was written for viewing of the solar energy systems from the street side. What would happen if somebody puts something up on their garage roof that is well behind the face of the house but can still be viewed by the neighbors?
- Would the property become non-conforming if a system was installed and the neighborhood later becomes a historic district?
- If a property is located on a corner and the system was shielded by a tree, and the tree is removed for some reason, would the system be grandfathered in?
- Would replacing a component of a wind or solar energy system need to come back before the City for approval?
- Many of the statements in the proposed draft are very reasonable for homeowners to abide by.
- What happens if a neighbor's tree is blocking the solar access? Or a neighbor decides to construct a second story onto their home and it blocks the solar access?

Mr. Perry referenced an item in the proposed code language pertaining to a property owner who has installed or intends to install a solar energy system being responsible for negotiating with other property owners in the vicinity for any necessary solar easement.

Discussion occurred about the city getting involved in civil matters. Mr. Osguthorpe said we may need to tiptoe into this process to get something in place now. Over the years, as we see the interest grow, we may at some point want to become more aggressive about solar access and protection at the city level.

Kori Heuss said these are good questions for property owners to think about, but sometimes it may not be the Commission's role to guarantee that something will be successful 20 years from now.

Ms. Heuss further stated that, as she has been talking to people about this subject, she has found they aren't as concerned about solar energy systems as much as they are about wind turbines. She said these people have questions and concerns about the height of the turbines, will the ice crack and fall on their house, and how loud will they be.

Mr. Perry explained that wind turbines are held to standards that are almost double of what houses are held to. And the only difference between a wind turbine and a utility pole is they have a moving object on top. He said it's possible that we may only allow wind turbines in commercial and industrial zones first to prove their stability and to get the public used to seeing them within the community.

Discussion occurred with regard to the potential liability issues in the event that a wind turbine falls, as well as the potential noise and flicker issues.

Elizabeth Beck said one of the issues for her is the balance of aesthetics versus the value of alternative energy. She said she would come down on the side of alternative energy, but she would be bothered by the aesthetics when looking at the towers above the tree lines, especially

if they were irregularly placed. She said the wind farms are beautiful because they have this pattern of placement, but she is not convinced that the aesthetics in town would outweigh the value of the wind turbine.

Discussion then occurred about the two wind turbines located outside of the Ames city limits. Staff suggested the possibility of the Commission and staff taking a field trip prior to the next Commission meeting to visit these two properties. Staff indicated that they will also e-mail the Commission members with the exact locations of these two wind turbines in the event that they would like to visit these properties individually on their own.

Chuck Jons said he would like to see us slowly approach this into the community. He said he certainly likes the idea of the PRD, or future plans that have incentives associated with it for subdivisions, but he does not want to try to push something onto the community. He said one of the things that Ames still has going for it, is its small town appearance, which is an attribute that he would hate for Ames to lose.

Ms. Heuss said this is something that could be very divisive to the community.

Mr. Cloud said we have spent a lot of time on wind turbines because they have the most obvious characteristics about them (height, flicker, and noise), so maybe we should be conservative in where they are allowed. He further stated that he doesn't think we should be so conservative for allowing solar energy systems, since they can disappear onto light colored roofing material or be located behind a house in places that most people will not see them.

Mr. Osguthorpe said he thinks this draft ordinance strikes a good balance if the Commission is looking to start carefully and slowly.

Mr. Perry then gave a summary of the proposed ordinance language. The Commission made the following comments or suggestions during this summary discussion:

- Two Commission members thought a definitive “no” from the City would be a problem. Allowing the ability for an applicant to go to the Zoning Board of Adjustment to plead their case gives a level of predictability and flexibility.
- It was suggested that graphics be included with the ordinance, which would show different options for where these systems would be allowed.
- It was suggested that staff take a closer look at the numbers under Section 13.09 Solar Energy Systems, Item 5.
- It was suggested that staff consider exempting integrated solar thermal metal roofing systems.
- It was suggested that staff take into consideration some zone specific language for buffering requirements between zoning districts.

Ms. Beck said she thinks there is a point where we just have to make a start and do our best guess and see how it works. She said there are a lot of “what ifs” down the road, and we can't answer all of the questions until we make a start.

COMMISSION COMMENTS: The Commission thanked staff for doing an excellent job on the wind and solar energy topic.

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STAFF COMMENTS: Mr. Osguthorpe updated the Commission on the possible amendments to the Subdivision Regulations pertaining to fire truck turn-a-rounds, as well as looking into the creation of a process that would allow an amendment to an approved final plat that would not require the applicant to go through a full-fledged process as if it were an original application.

Staff reviewed the tentative agenda for the meeting of August 5, 2009.

Mr. Osguthorpe mentioned that the Subdivision Code amendments pertaining to plats of survey received second reading last night at City Council, with the projected effective date of those amendments to be August 4.

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With no further business coming before the Commission, the Chair declared the meeting adjourned at 8:05 p.m.

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Cindy L. Hollar, Recording Secretary  
Department of Planning & Housing

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Kori Heuss, Vice-Chairperson  
Planning & Zoning Commission