

**TOWN OF SWEDEN  
Planning Board Minutes  
January 25, 2021**

A regular meeting of the Town of Sweden Planning Board was held on Monday, January 25, 2021, at the Sweden Town Park Lodge, 4761 Redman Road, Brockport, New York, commencing at 7 p.m.

Members present: David Hale; Matthew Minor; Craig McAllister; Wayne Rickman, Peter Sharpe; David Strabel.

Absent: Richard Dollard – (Excused); Nat O. Lester, III, Planning Board Counsel – (Excused).

Also present: James Oberst, P.E., MRB; Cathy Wang and John Dai; Peter Papagelis; Gene Thompson; Jane McKinney; Catherine Bauer; Tony Gianni; Scott Sigler; L. Maggills; Michael Prinzi, Adam Rizzo, Nathan Rizzo, Paul Lavoie – Solar Liberty.

Chairman McAllister called the meeting to order at 7 p.m. and asked everyone present to say the Pledge of Allegiance.

Correspondence was passed to members for review.

Moved by Mr. Rickman, seconded by Mr. Hale, that the minutes of January 11, 2021, be approved.

Chairman McAllister - Aye  
Mr. Dollard – Absent  
Mr. Hale - Aye  
Mr. Minor – Aye  
Mr. Rickman – Aye  
Mr. Sharpe - Abstain  
Mr. Strabel – Aye

Moved by Mr. Minor, seconded by Mr. Strabel, that the regular meeting be adjourned to the public hearing.

Chairman McAllister – Aye  
Mr. Dollard – Absent  
Mr. Hale - Aye  
Mr. Minor – Aye  
Mr. Rickman - Aye  
Mr. Sharpe - Aye  
Mr. Strabel – Aye

The Public Hearing began at 7:03 p.m.

**Kreher Solar Farm Subdivision, Site Plan and Special Use Permit. 4490 Sweden Walker Road. 085.01-1-3.11.**

Chairman McAllister stated the purpose of tonight’s meeting is to get any questions, comments or concerns the public may have relative to this application so that the Board has the information to reference when the review is started.

Solar Liberty began with a brief presentation of the project.

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Mr. Nathan Rizzo addressed the Board. He explained Solar Liberty is a Buffalo-based installer and has been installing solar systems for the past 18 years. This system will be one of the largest systems installed.

Mr. Rizzo offered a little background on the company stating that he and his brother Adam started the company in 2003. The company has installed a little over 150 megawatts or approximately 300,000 solar panels. It has installed approximately 10 megawatts for Monroe County at two sites Gloria Drive Landfill and Northwest Quadrant Treatment Plant. Both facilities have been up and running for about three years and producing savings for the county itself.

The company has donated about 120 systems in Western New York to various non-profit organizations. Out of those 120 systems, the organizations are saving \$500,000 annually. Solar power is the gift that keeps on giving. Once the system is installed, the sun is being farmed and producing electricity.

Pertaining to the solar farm proposed in the Town of Sweden, it is considered a community solar project. The system ties into the utility lines at the road. All the energy the system produces is sent right back into the grid and a dollar value is generated. Next, is to find off takers for the power, which is where the community aspect comes into play as we would be looking to the community to sell the solar credits to. Essentially, the system would be saving the community \$100,000 to \$200,000 annually.

Off takers of the power can be homeowners, renters, not-for-profits, and business customers. From the commercial aspect, only 40 percent of the credits produced can be sold to businesses. A great deal of the benefactors of the system will be residential customers. The Town of Sweden can participate. Off takers would still get their electric bill from the utility company, which would show the credit from the solar project that has been provided at a lesser rate for which the credit can be applied to National Grid. This project is in National Grid territory and so one of the rules is that all off takers have to be National Grid customers.

The site plan shows the system will be installed in the field where there is approximately 400 ft. of woods behind the homes located on Campbell Road to the field. From a solar perspective, not only does the utility allow us to connect a system of this size, but from a vegetation screening aspect, there is very little visual impact to the surrounding neighborhood and roadways.

Mr. Rizzo stated he would offer his business card to anyone interested in receiving the presentation via email.

A nice aspect of solar projects from a renewable energy perspective is that the solar panels are relatively low to the ground. Mr. Rizzo showed what one row of solar panels would look like keeping in mind there would be groups of modules. The modules will be mounted two panels high and all panels facing south. The lowest or southern edge would be 3 ft. off the ground with the backside of the solar panels 8 ft. off the ground. Not looking to push any dirt around but rather follow the current topography. Concrete is not used for footers. The vertical posts are drilled into the ground every 16 ft. east to west. Installation is much simpler and easy to remove after the system is done serving its use. The system is made up of galvanized steel so in terms of decommissioning, all steel and the mounting system can be recycled and repurposed.

One question received prior to the public hearing was if the solar system uses motors to track the sun. This system uses a fixed system so there are no moving components, no motors or sound. Chairman McAllister confirmed with Mr. Rizzo this system does not track.

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There will be no removal of snowfall on the panels which eliminates the number of visits to the site. Scheduled maintenance includes crews visiting the site to perform preventative maintenance twice a year. The area of the solar system will be kept with low vegetation which means the area will be landscaped, mowed and weed wacked three times a year to keep a clean vegetative look.

Another question asked a lot is what chemicals are used in a solar system. Solar modules are made of a clear glass on top of the solar panel; aluminum frame encased in the glass providing structural support for the module, a white back sheet holds the cells and is weather proofed. The cells are manufactured out of silicon, (quartz and sand). A pathway is provided for all the electrons produced. That pathway is on top of the solar panel/cells, and is the silver colored grid work or ribbon which creates the pathway for the electrons to flow within the module itself. The modules are connected with wires on the back of the panels.

Mr. Rizzo introduced Mr. Mike Prinzi, Project Manager, who covers the environmental due diligence on the project. Mr. Prinzi's role in the company is to work with environment and design engineers throughout the development process. Projects of this size require a SEQR whereby a full environmental assessment form is submitted to the Board for review. All environmental aspects are discussed to see how the environmental impacts affect the project and then it is voted on. For this project, there are minimal environmental impacts which include endangered or threatened species, wetlands in the area, and archaeological issues with the site. Because this project is affecting more than one acre of disturbance, a SWPPP will be completed and filed with the DEC and a Notice of Intent. The DEC regulates the stormwater pollution prevention plan to ensure no wastewater is tampered with and soils aren't leaving the site.

Chairman McAllister asked Mr. Prinzi to explain to the audience what a SWPPP is as they are concerned with drainage from the site resulting from this project.

Mr. Prinzi explained a SWPPP is a full report put together by environmental engineers that tells how to control and mitigate stormwater pollution. One aspect of the SWPPP is the DEC requires the site to be inspected every other day for a project of this size. Inspections make sure there aren't any soils or contaminants leaving the site. A Sediment Erosion Control Plan is put together. The whole site is encompassed with a protective fence. A silt fence uses a fabric to create a filtration system so only water can pass through or a silt sock which has sediment in it again allowing only water to pass through.

Anytime more than one acre of land is disturbed, a SWPPP is required and is regulated by the DEC. The Solar Liberty staff is fully trained and completes thorough inspections per DEC regulations as outlined. Lastly, an environmental site assessment is completed as part of the land transaction. The whole history of the site is looked at with a fine-tooth comb. For example, the title of the property is researched, if there were any environmental spills at any time, and the history of ownership of the property. This assessment is done every six months to make sure nothing has changed. For this project, Passero Associates is taking care of all environmental engineering.

Mr. Prinzi mentioned that there is a threat of endangered species on the property located in a buffer zone which means trees cannot be cut down during a certain time or have mitigation measures put in place. There are some potential wetlands in the area for which wetland delineation will show where they are and to stay out of them. They are not jurisdictional wetlands so the ACOE and DEC are not looking for the wetlands to be permitted. In summary, the site has no environmental impacts from what has been seen thus far and is a really good site for solar.

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Mr. Nathan Rizzo distributed information to the Board regarding solar and property values. He addressed whether solar systems impact the resale of homes. This has been proven to be a myth. There is no direct correlation between a solar system project and a home's resale value. Homes surrounding a solar site follow the same escalation and retail rates as if the solar system did not exist. The information uses three different studies that provide supporting documentation that solar systems do not impact property values.

This site was chosen for a number of reasons by Solar Liberty and the property owners, Kreher Brothers. First, Kreher Brothers own approximately 5,500 acres. Mr. Rizzo read a letter submitted by Kreher Brothers that he distributed to the Board, and will be made part of the record. The letter explains why they have chosen this site for solar energy.

Mr. Rizzo highlighted the overall area and showed views of how the field isn't visible from any roads or homes surrounding the property. He explained for this project there are three observational points, OPs, or homes in the area. Each OP was shown and discussed how the current vegetation blocks the field from view.

Chairman McAllister confirmed that the home on Sweden Walker Road, OP1, is approximately 240 ft. from the field. Mr. Prinzi reiterated that no trees will be removed so there will be a nice vegetative screen for the duration of the project.

A resident asked is there a possibility of expanding the solar system into the wooded area. Mr. Rizzo stated the system is tied to the lines at the road and the capacity has been maxed out. From a financial perspective and liability standpoint, there is no expansion they could make to increase the project system's size.

Chairman McAllister asked when we enter the question portion of the hearing; we will need a name and address.

Pat Papagelis – 369 Campbell Road – Mr. Papagelis asked if there are designated wetlands. Mr. Prinzi stated there is a section of non-jurisdictional wetlands in the woods, and delineation will be done of the whole site. Financially, it does not make sense to do work in the wetlands. The area will be staked so the installers know how far to stay away from the wetlands. The ACOE or DEC will take responsibility of that wetland.

Mr. Rizzo stated the last two slides showed a rendering of what the solar system would look like. One slide shows the system with fencing and no vegetative screening. The other slide shows the system if the Town wanted vegetative screening. Mr. Rizzo recommends giant arborvitaes, 4 ft. to 6 ft., which would grow to about 14 ft.

Mr. Rizzo would be happy to answer any other questions.

Cathy Bauer – 4475 Sweden Walker Rd – Ms. Bauer asked if the project is approved how long will construction last. Mr. Rizzo said a project of this size will last four to six months. What type of noise will be produced? Mr. Rizzo stated hand tools will be used when the vertical posts are being set. This will last about five weeks, maximum. How loud? Mr. Prinzi stated it would only be during business hours, 7 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. It would sound like a hammer. We don't work Sundays and would follow the Town's noise ordinance if one is in place.

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Mr. Hale stated the Town does have a noise ordinance. Ms. Bauer asked what the decibel level is. Mr. Hale stated he would have to look at the ordinance. Mr. Strabel indicated the permitted work time is between 7 a.m. to 9 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Ms. Bauer wanted to know where the access driveway is located. Mr. Prinzi stated the existing driveway will be used. Mr. Rizzo explained that the machine used to drive the post is called a GRT machine and one can google it to see how loud it will be. Ms. Bauer asked if the road traffic will be impacted during construction. Mr. Rizzo stated typically a truck or two per day will make deliveries. If needed, there will be a flag man on site to help with traffic. Ms. Bauer stated so not more than there is presently. She wanted to know how long the panels will be in place. Mr. Rizzo stated there is a land lease for 25 years.

Janet McKinney, 4415 Sweden Walker Road – Ms. McKinney asked how far behind the Elks Lodge will the solar system be. Mr. Rizzo pointed to the farm field which he thought the Elks Lodge was just past that. The Elks Lodge is right across from Ms. McKinney. Mr. Rizzo stated Ms. McKinney should not be able to see the system from her house. Where will drainage go, to the road? Mr. Rizzo stated the panels will not be on the ground so drainage would be as it is now. So where would snow, water go? Mr. Rizzo just as it does now, off the panels into the ground.

Cathy Bauer, 4475 Sweden Walker Road - Ms. Bauer asked if there were any negative impacts after panels are removed. Are there any contaminants to humans, animals? No. Mr. Rizzo explained the vertical posts that are placed in the ground are high beams made out of galvanized steel. Concrete is not used in the footers so at the end of the system's life, the posts are just pulled out.

Janet McKinney, 4415 Sweden Walker Road - Ms. McKinney asked if there will be permits from the utility company and an agreement in place. Mr. Rizzo stated an interconnection has been filed with the utility company notifying them of the specific location the project will connect at. The cost for interconnection is given and paid. The utility company then gives the okay to install the system.

Cathy Wang, 4450 Sweden Walker Road – Ms. Wang stated her house is OP1 directly in front of the solar farm. How far is the solar farm from my house? Mr. Rizzo stated to Ms. Wang's rear property line, it is 240 ft. Ms. Wang explained she just bought the house for her family to live in and it has been vacant for many years. She will have to spend a lot of money to rehab the house. She just found out there will be a solar farm in the back of the house and doesn't know how that will affect her young family in the future. Mr. Rizzo stated there shouldn't be any hazards. The solar farm has a 6 ft. high fence with barb wire on the top that goes completely around it to protect children. Ms. Wang works in real estate and is concerned how the solar farm will affect her property values. When people see the solar panels in the backyard, they will not like it. I am opposed to this project.

Mr. Rizzo offered his business card to send her information regarding this. He reiterated that the solar farm is approximately 240 ft. to the property line, not the home. Ms. Wang commented from a vegetation perspective, she should not see the panels in the summer, but in the winter she will.

Mr. Prinzi assured Ms. Wang that there will be a nice clean access driveway back to the solar panels, and it will be maintained. There will be someone onsite only two to three times a year. Instead of this property being a working farm it will be a solar farm where the sun is harvested.

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Ms. Wang asked how the community benefits from the solar farm. When construction begins Solar Liberty will work with the Town to have an opening where only community residents can participate in the solar project and receive credits. Ms. Wang asked if it is known how much each household will save. Mr. Rizzo stated a 10 percent savings on the homeowner's electric bill. From a community perspective the savings is about \$102,000. Mr. Rizzo added from a taxing perspective, negotiations are under way with Monroe County for a pilot.

Gene Thompson, 372 Campbell Road – Mr. Thompson confirmed with Mr. Rizzo that it would be open to individual homeowners. As solar becomes more efficient over the next 25 years how does upgrading the system work. The solar panels come with a 25 to 30 year warranty and a design life of 45 years. The initial investment would be made back in 10 to 15 years. This technology should last for the 25 year period. After that a negotiation with the landowner to swap the solar panels out would have to be worked out. Mr. Thompson thought more efficient panels could be swapped out as they become available. Mr. Rizzo explained that the solar project designed is specific to the system size so swapping panels for more efficient ones would not work.

Pat Papagelis, 396 Campbell Road – Mr. Papagelis confirmed with Mr. Rizzo that the panels produce DC Voltage which is then inverted back to the Grid. Solar Liberty will be installing 125 kilowatt inverters. Discussion regarding the use of oil based transformers and specific type took place. The oil used is vegetable oil. Mr. Prinzi stated checking the oil and checking for leaks twice a year is part of the preventative maintenance plan. Solar Liberty doesn't get paid if our system is not operating most efficiently. There will be a spill prevention plan in place.

Mr. Papagelis asked how the snow affects cost savings. Are cost savings averaged out? The savings per each customer is off the credit that is being produced. Mr. Rizzo explained that it's based on 30 years of environmental weather attributes along with the metrics of the system. Variables are known such as interconnection costs and negotiated payments to the County. It's a 10 percent savings as long as contracted with National Grid. Your supplier does not have to be changed. Mr. Rizzo explained from a credit perspective, the requirements are that you have to have the same utility and if a third party supplier of electricity is used, online paying with National Grid must be used.

Chairman McAllister clarified that while a customer's usage may change, up or down, the 10 percent savings is taken off whatever the bill amount is. Mr. Rizzo summarized that it is a financial transaction or for every \$100 given to a customer, \$90 is given back to the solar company.

Scott Sigler, 404 Campbell Road – Mr. Sigler asked what kind of heat is used with the solar panels. Mr. Rizzo stated there is no heat, the system captures electrons. The solar cells are used as a semi-conductor. When the sunlight hits the solar cells, it wakes up the electrons and a pathway is created for the electrons to flow. Mr. Sigler stated so heat is not a byproduct of creating electricity. Mr. Rizzo stated not in this case.

Janet McKinney, 4415 Sweden Walker Road – Ms. McKinney asked how many customers do you have in this type of a project and how do customers get in and out of the system. Mr. Rizzo stated from a contract perspective, a customer would sign up for a one year subscription through the solar farm advertisement and can cancel at any time. Ms. McKinney is asking from a renting perspective. The new renter would just sign up.

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Gene Thompson, 372 Campbell Road – Mr. Thompson asked if any of this gets pushed to the school systems or government buildings here as a priority that they may benefit from the solar power. Solar Liberty is looking for all off takers so if the school system or town would like to participate they would be welcomed. Again, this would be as a monetary transaction, not necessarily sending electricity to the school system.

Mr. Lavoie explained what's really beneficial to the community is that the solar farm demands very little service from the community. The solar farm is installed and then it is passive because there isn't a lot that has to be done. Almost all of the revenue generated through a pilot or taxes at a later time are going to be almost pure profit for the community. Half of the taxes that anyone pays would go to the school district, which is an indirect added benefit to the school district.

Chairman McAllister asked as part of the pilot, does the town and school district have to sign on. Mr. Rizzo stated the County does like support from the town and school district.

Mr. Rizzo clarified that the County likes to have positive feedback that the town is open to negotiating a pilot, but not necessarily sign on.

Chairman McAllister asked if there were any more comments, questions or concerns. There were none. He thanked everyone for their input tonight, and all comments and questions will be taken into consideration.

Chairman McAllister acknowledged a letter was received from Carol Schoch on Campbell Road which will be incorporated into the review as well. She had many of the same concerns discussed tonight. Mr. Lavoie asked for a copy of the letter. Mr. Prinzi confirmed that the Clerk had already forwarded a copy.

Chairman McAllister asked for a motion to adjourn the public hearing.

Ms. Wang had one additional question. She is new to the town and this process and wondered if she is opposed to it, will the project be cancelled. Chairman McAllister stated your opposition does not cancel it, but the Board will take your concerns into consideration during the review and try to mitigate them.

Ms. Wang is concerned with losing property value. Chairman McAllister stated it has not been proven that a solar farm affects property values. This is our third solar project. Only one has been approved.

Solar Liberty will work with a financing company that will be the owner and we will provide the long term maintenance and operations of the system. Solar Liberty will be the face of the system and what the public will see during its duration.

Chairman McAllister went over the process for Ms. Wang. The project starts with an accept for review making sure the Board has enough information to do a review, a public hearing is held to receive comments, and then a review is started for subdivision and site plan approval. The Board and Town Engineer will look at every aspect of the project including visual, environmental, and all technical aspects of the application. A special permit is required to operate the solar farm.

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This project has vegetation all around so the screening is very sufficient. Also required is a decommissioning bond that is posted so that when the project is done, there is money to return the land back to agriculture. All meetings are posted on the website so the public is welcome to attend and listen.

Moved by Mr. Hale, seconded by Mr. Strabel, to adjourn the public hearing to the regular meeting.

Chairman McAllister – Aye  
Mr. Dollard – Absent  
Mr. Hale - Aye  
Mr. Minor – Aye  
Mr. Rickman - Aye  
Mr. Sharpe - Aye  
Mr. Strabel – Aye

The Public Hearing ended at 8:05 p.m.

The meeting was adjourned on motion at 8:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Phyllis Brudz – Planning Board Clerk