



**Champaign County Board
Environment and Land Use Committee (ELUC)
County of Champaign, Urbana, Illinois**

MINUTES – Approved as Distributed May 8, 2025

DATE: Thursday, April 10, 2025
TIME: 6:30 p.m.
PLACE: Shields-Carter Meeting Room
Brookens Administrative Center
1776 E Washington, Urbana, IL 61802

Committee Members

Present	Absent
Aaron Esry (Vice-Chair)	
John Farney	
Jennifer Locke	
Emily Rodriguez	
Jilmala Rogers	
Chris Stohr	
Eric Thorsland (Chair)	

County Staff: John Hall (Zoning Administrator), and Mary Ward (Recording Secretary)

Others Present: None

MINUTES

I. Call to Order

Committee Chair Thorsland called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

II. Roll Call

Roll call was taken, and a quorum was declared present.

III. Approval of Agenda/Addendum

MOTION by Mr. Farney to approve the agenda; seconded by Ms. Rogers. Upon voice vote, the **MOTION CARRIED** unanimously.

IV. Approval of Minutes

A. March 6, 2025 – Regular Meeting

MOTION by Mr. Esry to approve the March 6, 2025 minutes; seconded by Ms. Locke. Upon voice vote, the **MOTION CARRIED** unanimously.

V. Public Input

David Holly with Little Prairie Solar (BayWa r.e.) spoke and presented a slide show on the project. It is a 135 MW hybrid project. It will provide an influx of jobs during construction. He then went through the timeline for the special use permit. They hosted a tailgate, met with adjoining neighbors and with stake holders in the project including Heritage and Unity school districts. It will utilize the same sub-station as the current BayWa r.e. project. This project will also include a 135 MW Battery Energy Storage System. They have been in constant communication with the Sidney Fire Department as it is an important component of the project. It is a 1047-acre project with about 8% within Tolono Unit 7 and 92% within Heritage school districts. A benefit of the project is passive income for the local taxing districts. The Battery Storage Facility is centered within the project. They have coordinated with Sidney Fire on the mitigation and emergency response plans for the project and will update and change as needed.

John Crosby with Little Prairie Solar (BayWa r.e.) spoke and presented the rest of the slide show. This project is in compliance with the Champaign County zoning ordinance. They are in compliance with the Illinois Pollution Control Board sound regulations. The project goes above and beyond on County landscaping requirements. They have asked for three waivers for the project as listed on the agenda. They have adjusted the mix of trees and shrubs in the landscaping per a neighbor's request. The ground cover will be a pollinator mix that has been specially designed by the Bee and Butterfly Habitat fund. They will be monitoring soil health for the first six years of the project. They would like to request approval of this project.

Cindy Shepherd – spoke in support of the Little Prairie Solar project. It will benefit the Sidney area with economic benefits and local school districts will be getting more funds to expand programs. She also supports it for environmental reasons. Coal and fossil fuel power has created enormous problems. Large scale solar projects are really the only way to get enough power onto the grid. Plus, the ground gets to rest for a few years.

Joyce Mast – spoke in support of the Little Prairie solar project. We need clean air, and solar farms do better than carbon producing plants. She is thinking of future generations in Champaign County.

VI. Communications

Mr. Esry spoke on concerns that Donato Solar is up and operating without a certificate of completion. He was speaking about the projects at 130 and Windsor Road and I-57 and Market St. There is no fence around it. Things appear to be running – two pad transformers are humming and with the electrical, everything is in the on position. The fencing is there, but not installed and nothing looks like it is being done. At I-57/Market St., the project has all the appearances that it is up and running. BayWa r.e. was putting in fence during the winter, why can't Donato Solar? They were in a hurry to get the projects built and they give all the signs that they are producing. Feels like they are thumbing their nose at the County.

Mr. Stohr asked if this is something that should be referred to the State's Attorney? Mr. Hall said Donato Solar now has more staff and he has provided letters explaining what is needed to complete each project. They are beginning to provide the items requested to be in compliance. Mr. Stohr also shared that the

Carbon Sequestration Activities Task Force will meet on Monday, April 21, at 4:00 p.m. in the Shields-Carter Meeting Room at Brookens.

Mr. Thorsland added another concern for Donato Solar; it does not look like pollinator plants; it looks more like weeds. He would like to see that they follow through on this.

VII. New Business: Items to be recommended to the County Board

A. Zoning Case 144-S-24. A request by Little Prairie Solar LLC, c/o BayWa r.e. Solar Projects LLC, 18575 Jamboree Road, Suite 850, Irvine CA 92612, via agent David Holly, Development Manager for BayWa r.e. Solar Projects LLC, and the participating landowners to authorize a Utility-Scale PV Solar Farm with a total nameplate capacity of 135 megawatts (MW), including access roads and wiring, and an accessory 135 MW Battery Energy Storage System (BESS), on approximately 1,047 acres with a fenced solar farm area of approximately 768 acres in the AG-1 Agriculture Zoning District in Sections 12, 13, 14, 15, 23 and 24 of Sidney Township, Township 18 North, Range 10 East of the 3rd Principal Meridian and including the following waivers of standard conditions:

Part A: A waiver for not entering into a Roadway Upgrade and Maintenance Agreement or waiver therefrom with the relevant local highway authority prior to consideration of the Special Use Permit by the Zoning Board of Appeals, per Section 6.1.5 G.(1).

Part B: A waiver for locating the PV Solar Farm less than one and one-half miles from an incorporated municipality per Section 6.1.5 B.(2)a.

Part C: A waiver for a separation distance of 225 feet between the solar inverters and the perimeter fence in lieu of the minimum required 275 feet, per Section 6.1.5 D.(6)

MOTION by Mr. Stohr to recommend County Board approval of a resolution approving Zoning Case 144-S-24; seconded by Ms. Locke.

At the recommendation of the Champaign County State's Attorney Ms. Rogers read a statement that although her law firm represents the company involved, she is not personally involved. She will be abstaining from the vote on both items tonight.

Mr. Stohr had questions about the waivers and why they were needed and what agreements/arrangements have been made with various parties. For Part A, Roadway Upgrade and Maintenance. They have been meeting with the Road Commissioner, who has been watching what is happening with the first phase of the project. They will be using the agreement from that phase as a template and want to see if anything needed to be added or changed.

Part B. Distance from an incorporated municipality, this waiver was asked for as this project is technically farther away than Prairie Solar 1. They did reach out to the village and received no feedback. The Part C. waiver for the separation distance, one of the solar inverters could only be 225 feet. It falls in the

project boundary but not the fence line. It is specific to one inverter location. The nearest structure is more than 2,000 feet away.

Mr. Stohr asked a follow-up question about the roadway waiver. Mr. Holly said they are working with the Township Road Commissioner. There will need to be repairs and the cost will fall on the project. They were not sure at this time of the types of repairs, they are following the lead of the Township on the first phase.

Mr. Esry said that on Prairie Solar 1, there were grade alterations done. Will that happen with this project? It will likely need to be done. If there are grading activities, there are strict guidelines that have to be followed. Mr. Esry has a problem with this as the fill is clay and the topsoil is not getting a rest. The topsoil is stripped, fill is brought in, and the topsoil is replaced. The clay layer will not let water drain like natural sub-soil. With the Phase 1 project, feels we were led to believe that this wouldn't happen. They probably followed regulations, but it will not be the same. He will probably vote no on this due to this along with the fact that the state has taken away the County's zoning rights. He appreciates that BayWa r.e. is meeting the County's ordinances. Green energy probably did a lot of lobbying to make that happen.

Mr. Stohr asked if these were on pads or piles. Mr. Holly said the solar modules are on piles and the inverters would likely have pads under them. Mr. Esry was asked if the modules being on piles changed his mind any. It did not. They will still be changing the grade. He feels they are in compliance but that is altering the soil structure and ability to grow crops forever. Mr. Holly said any dirt movement is a known quantity and volume. Part of the decommissioning is returning the land to preconstruction contours, and they would know exactly where fill dirt had been added to go back and remove it.

Mr. Stohr said that there is a difference in soil vs dirt. What you are dealing with is soil. Dirt is something that occurs on a floor. Soil is something precious and the basis of our agricultural economy.

Mr. Farney asked what happens if this goes through and we find that drainage has been changed for adjacent landowners and we know it is from the project. What kind of remedy do we have for this. Mr. Hall said that surface drainage is not supposed to change as a basic tenet of drainage law. We could probably take an enforcement action. If this is a concern, we would need to let the petitioner know in advance that we will be doing a more detailed review on the permit to try to cut off claims regarding surface flow. He's not sure if it changes anyone's concerns, in Phase 1, they did pattern tiling under the whole project, even where they graded the subsoil. For this project, they are just re-routing what is needed.

Mr. Thorsland said that we grow a lot of fuel, and this is just another way of doing so. Also, this is a way to keep the farm in the family with passive income from the solar farm. He will be voting yes. He would rather see this than coal or wind. With battery storage, we are addressing the concerns about what happens when the sun is not shining.

Mr. Esry added that we grow food and fuel at the same time. One is a co-product of the other. This ground is in production and has been for years. What we take out of production here is picked up somewhere else in the world.

Mr. Farney asked about the pattern tiling and why it's not being used in Phase 2. Mr. Holly said it is expensive and would be economically unfeasible for the project. What is there now is working well. If there is an issue, the project is required to fix it. They also work with the drainage districts.

Upon roll call vote, the **MOTION CARRIED**. The vote was five yays (Farney, Locke, Rodriguez, Stohr and Thorsland), one nay (Esry) and one abstaining (Rogers). This will not be on the consent agenda.

- B. Decommissioning and Site Reclamation Plan for Zoning Case 144-S-24.** A request by Little Prairie Solar LLC, c/o BayWa r.e. Solar Projects LLC, 18575 Jamboree Road, Suite 850, Irvine CA 92612, via agent David Holly, Development Manager for BayWa r.e. Solar Projects LLC, and the participating landowners included in the legal advertisement to approve a Decommissioning and Site Reclamation Plan for the Utility-Scale PV Solar Farm in Zoning Case 144-S-24 with a total nameplate capacity of 135 megawatts (MW), including access roads and wiring, and an accessory 135 MW Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) in Sections 12, 13, 14, 15, 23 and 24 of Sidney Township, Township 18 North, Range 10 East of the 3rd Principal Meridian.

MOTION by Mr. Stohr to recommend County Board approval of a resolution approving the Decommissioning and Site Reclamation Plan for Zoning Case 144-S-24; seconded by Ms. Locke.

Mr. Farney asked about when these go to County Board, what type of vote is required. Both of these items would be straight majority rules.

Mr. Hall said that of each of the solar farms, this one has the lowest demo costs and salvage costs.

Upon voice vote, the **MOTION CARRIED**. The vote was not unanimous, so this will not be on the consent agenda.

VIII. Other Business

A. Monthly Reports -None

There was no other business and there were no Monthly Reports.

IX. Chair's Report

There was no Chair's Report.

X. Designation of Items to be Placed on the Consent Agenda

There were no items to be placed on the Consent Agenda.

XI. Adjournment

Chair Thorsland adjourned the meeting at 7:33 p.m.