

MINUTES OF THE KNOX COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

April 9, 2024

Call to order: The April 9, 2024, meeting of the Knox County Planning Commission was called to order by Chairman Dean Wilken at 7:29 p.m. at the Knox County Courthouse Board of Supervisors meeting room.

Announcement of Open Meeting Act: Chairman Wilken announced where the Open Meetings Act is posted.

Roll Call: Members present: Jim Kotrous, Keith Neilsen, David Arens, Robert Ganz, Greg Kuhlman, Neil Clausen, Doug DeShazer and Dean Wilken. Absent: Robert Larsen Also present was Zoning Administrator Kelsy Jelinek, County Attorney John Thomas, Matt Woolery of National Grid Renewables, Vanessa Silke of Baird Holm, and members of the public.

Approve Agenda & Public Notice in the Wausa Gazette Kotrous moved, Kuhlman seconded to approve the agenda and public notice which was published in the Wausa Gazette. Roll call vote showed all present in favor Ayes: Jim Kotrous, Keith Neilsen, David Arens, Robert Ganz, Greg Kuhlman, Neil Clausen, Doug DeShazer and Dean Wilken. Absent: Robert Larsen

Approve the Minutes from the March 12, 2024 Meeting. Kotrous moves, Deshazer seconded to approve the minutes from March 12, 2024. Roll call vote showed all present in favor Ayes: Jim Kotrous, Keith Neilsen, David Arens, Robert Ganz, Greg Kuhlman, Neil Clausen, Doug DeShazer and Dean Wilken. Absent: Robert Larsen

Ex Parte Communications: Board members stated that several had been contacted regarding the topic of the wetland setback and wind towers in general.

Old Business: Administrator Jelinek presented National Grid Renewals previous application requesting an amendment to the Knox County zoning regulations decreasing the wetland setback for WECS from current regulation of 1.1 times the total height to their request of 200 ft. Baird Holm representative, Vanessa Silke, presented findings since the last meeting by stating several permits that must be acquired by the wind tower company regardless of the zoning regulations. Jelinek's recommendation remains to deny the application for the WECS wetland setback amendment to the zoning regulations based on Knox County's Comprehensive Plan Chapter 11 – Natural Resources and Environmental Goals and Policies. This recommendation also comes with input from Nebraska Game and Parks Fish and Wildlife buffer recommendations for wind energy projects, Nebraska Department of Natural Resources, and Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy. A survey of other counties across the state was also presented to the planning commission.

Kotrous moves to deny the amendment request of 200 ft. based on our current regulations as they stand. Deshazer seconds denial of the amendment request. Roll call vote: Jim Kotrous, Keith Neilsen, David Arens, Robert Ganz, Greg Kuhlman, Neil Clausen, Doug DeShazer and Dean Wilken. Absent: Robert Larsen

New Business: Doug Nelson of Wayne was present to discuss some findings on wind tower projects and his opinion on how tax credits work.

Election of Officers: Greg Kuhlman makes a motion to nominate Dean Wilken as Chairman, Rob Ganz seconds the motion. Roll call vote: Jim Kotrous, Keith Neilsen, David Arens, Robert Ganz, Greg Kuhlman, Neil Clausen, Doug DeShazer Abstain: Dean Wilken. Absent: Robert Larsen

Jim Kotrous makes a motion to nominate Rob Ganz as vice-president and Keith Nielsen as Secretary. Dave Arens seconds the motion. Roll call vote: Jim Kotrous, David Arens, Greg Kuhlman, Neil Clausen, Doug DeShazer and Dean Wilken. Abstain: Kieth Nielsen and Rob Ganz. Absent: Robert Larsen

Public Comments:

Karen K- Commented on things to consider before you sign a lease which included: decommissioning, shadow/flicker mitigation, road repairs, non-leaseholder properties. Recommends setbacks change from non-participating landowner setbacks to 2 miles.

Cale Giese – Center for Infrastructure and Economic Development – Mayor of Wayne – Commented that he did not agree with Doug Nelson’s presentation.

Alex Wiebelhaus – Wausa – Acreage owner asks for zoning regs to continue being looked at. Cedar and Holt Counties increased non-participating neighboring dwellings setbacks to 1 mile. Asked the board to look at cattle and crop production near the wind turbines. In most cases the farmer doesn’t own the land, and yield declines. This family would move if the towers went up.

Adam Mertens – Wausa – Asks that board consider the people’s opinions that live here and consider an increase to non-participating neighboring dwelling setbacks. He’d suggest 5 miles. His family including 4 kids would leave the school and would be moving if the towers would be approved.

David Cunningham – Wausa – Asks that setbacks be looked at, separate wind towers and livestock to keep rural Nebraska rural.

Rich Kleinschmit – Wausa – Has concerns about turbines catching on fire with the high winds and the effects.

Zoning Administrator’s Report: The March Permit Reports were reviewed.

Next Meeting: The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, May 14th at 7:30 p.m.

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 8:41 p.m. by Chairman Wilken.

Kelsy Jelinek, Zoning Administrator

Approved by Planning Commission: May 14, 2024

Placed on File with Board of Supervisors: August 21, 2024