

Planning Commission Meeting

Minutes



**May 24, 2021, 4:30 p.m.
Electronic Via Zoom
207 Lafayette Street
Winona, MN 55987**

Members Present: Commissioner Brian Buelow, Commissioner Brad Ballard, Commissioner LaVerne Olson, Commissioner Ed Hahn, Commissioner Amy Jo Marks, Commissioner Dale Boettcher, Commissioner Todd Paddock, Commissioner Peter Shortridge

Members Absent: Commissioner Daniel Hall

Staff Present: City Planner Carlos Espinosa, Assistant City Planner Luke Sims

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 4:30 PM by Chairman Brian Buelow.

2. Approval of Minutes-May 10, 2021

The minutes from the Planning Commission meeting of May 10, 2021 were reviewed.

Moved by Commissioner Boettcher

Seconded by Commissioner Olson

To approve the minutes.

Motion Carried Unanimously

3. WSU Carport Solar Site Plan Review

Mr. Espinosa provided an overview of the proposed carport solar project which was forwarded to the Planning Commission due to the size of the project and its visibility in the City. The project locates solar panels atop car ports over parking spaces in the parking lot adjacent to the Integrated Wellness Center at Winona

State University. This project helps address the University's energy needs. Mr. Espinosa stated that the solar panels atop the carport structures are being treated as accessory uses to the existing parking facility. This is consistent with residential solar arrays, for example. Mr. Espinosa recommended approval of the site plan with contingencies that the structures on which the solar panels are mounted shall cover the entire length of the parking stalls as proposed and that the project shall be designed to minimize the extent possible for glare on surrounding residential properties. Mr. Espinosa noted that MnDOT has signed off on the project on May 24, 2021 which makes the third consideration in the agenda packet superfluous.

Eric Rehm of McKinstry, representing the project, provided a brief summary of the project. He highlighted the national presence of McKinstry and its past work in the State of Minnesota, including work with the University of Minnesota and Minneapolis/St. Paul International Airport. Mr. Rehm noted that the project will be a self-funded project using future energy savings to reduce the campus' energy consumption by more than 24% and carbon emissions by more than 25%. He mentioned that this will be the first MinnState solar carport project in the system.

Commissioner Boettcher asked when the project is anticipated to be implemented and if parking would be underneath. Sean Currie, a project developer for the project, said the project would begin in late Spring 2022. He mentioned that vehicles will be parked below and the project serves two purposes: harvesting energy and protecting cars.

Chairman Buelow asked how stormwater will be channeled based on the proposed layout. Mr. Currie responded that the panels are tilted toward the center to have the water infiltrate to the islands in the parking lot with a new infiltration system to drain to the south to the islands and percolate into the stormwater and infiltrate into the system as an infiltration basin. Mr. Espinosa asked if the basins exist currently. Mr. Currie said the islands do and there are pathways for water to run to the get to the islands and infiltrate in. Chairman Buelow mentioned it sounds like a good plan for infiltration.

Commissioner Shortridge asked to clarify that this will reduce the amount of runoff. He also asked about charging stations being implemented. Mr. Currie responded that the plan will include three charging stations along the north parking stalls, two smaller stations and one fast charging station. Mr. Rehm noted that this will be a total of six vehicles able to be charged simultaneously.

Commissioner Paddock asked if the project meeting 24% of energy needs was the maximum or if it could be clarified. Mr. Rehm responded that the overall project was 24% but the carport solar will represent about 5%.

Commissioner Olson asked how snow would be handled. Mr. Rehm responded that nature would melt the snow and the slope would direct water to the basin as described before. The proposed strategy is a non-maintenance strategy. He mentioned that sometimes there may be some snow on the panels but the energy rates take that into consideration. Commissioner Olson mentioned that the angle does not appear particularly great and typically they would be at a sharper angle but it is not the concern of the Commission but something to consider for the project. Mr. Rehm responded that his firm uses 30 years of weather data for the modeling and the impact on overall potential of the solar array and it remains a good project for the university and its energy goals.

Commissioner Olson asked about the panels and runoff absorption rates for large precipitation events. Mr. Currie responded that the hard surface being created will be the same amount as exists currently, but will instead be elevated and will still flow into the basin and will be able to handle the runoff load. Commissioner Olson mentioned he does not have a problem with the project.

Commissioner Shortridge moved to approve with the conditions. Commissioner Marks seconded the motion.

Commissioner Hahn asked about how the melt has worked in past projects. John Neville, representing the project, has mentioned that the other two referenced projects before have similar slopes and snow melts within hours or, occasionally, a day and there have not been issues.

Commissioner Hahn commended the University for the use of the space, accomplishing two things with one design. Chairman Buelow and Commissioner Boettcher expressed agreement.

Commissioner Olson asked how many parking spaces would be lost. Mr. Rehm responded that no spaces will be lost. Commissioner Olson expressed general concern for the amount of parking off-campus nearby.

Commissioner Shortridge echoed the commendation of Winona State

University. He mentioned that future parking structures should possibly also have required solar improvements. Mr. Neville mentioned that his team would like to have similar projects with the City.

Commissioner Hahn asked about the 30-year performance of the panels and whether there are plans for upgradability. Mr. Rehm responded that the production warranty of the modules themselves will be about 85% at the end of the period. He noted that it makes sense today and you expect it to perform as expected down the line.

Moved by Commissioner Shortridge
Seconded by Commissioner Marks

Motion Carried Unanimously

4. Other Business

Mr. Espinosa informed the Commission that City staff has met with five consultant teams about proposals to-date both in-state and nationally.

Commissioner Olson asked if there was going to be a move back to in-person in the near future for the Planning Commission. Mr. Espinosa said that the Planning Commission will move back to in-person when other commissions and boards do, possibly at the end of June. Commissioner Olson said there was some concern about the accessibility of online for the meetings, particularly for some of the more controversial issues that may arise. Commissioner Paddock mentioned that some people may not be able to take part in-person but can via Zoom. He mentioned that in-person for controversial items may be more appealing. Chairman Buelow, Commissioners Hahn and Boettcher all agreed that in-person can be more helpful sometimes.

5. Adjournment

The Commission voted in favor of adjournment at 5:00 pm.

Moved by Commissioner Shortridge
Seconded by Commissioner Boettcher

Motion Carried Unanimously

Handwritten signature of Luke Sims in black ink, with the initials 'fEM' written in a smaller font to the right of the signature.

Luke Sims, Assistant City Planner