

**WRIGHT COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION**

**Meeting of: OCTOBER 23, 2025**

**MINUTES**

The Wright County Planning Commission met on Thursday, October 23, 2025, in the County Commissioners Board Room at the Wright County Government Center, Buffalo, Minnesota. Chairman, Dan Mol, called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. with members present: Jeanne Holland, Ken Felger, Sandy Greninger, Pat Mahlberg, Charlie Borrell and Dan Bravinder. Brian Wold, Assistant County Attorney, was the legal counsel present. Barry Rhineberger, Planning & Zoning Administrator, represented the Planning & Zoning office.

**ACTION ON OCTOBER 2, 2025, MINUTES**

Bravinder motioned to adopt the minutes for the October 2, 2025 meeting as printed. Seconded by Holland.

**MOTION CARRIED**

Member Borrell abstained, as he was not a member of the Planning Commission nor was he in attendance prior to tonight's meeting.

**PUBLIC HEARINGS:**

1. **JENNIFER GARDNER** – Cont. 9/11 & 10/2

LOCATION: 199 Jansen Ave SE – part of the E 1/2 of the NE 1/4 in Section 03, Township 119, Range 24, Wright County, Minnesota. (Rockford Twp.) Tax #215-000-031108. Property Owner: JENNIFER GARDNER

Petitions to rezone the property from General Agriculture (AG) to Urban/Rural Transition (R-1), as regulated in Sections 155.028, 155.048 & 155.049, Title XV, Land Usage & Zoning of the Wright County Code of Ordinances.

Present: Jennifer Gardner

- A. Rhineberger reminded the Commission that the item was heard on September 11 and October 2, with a continuation granted to allow time for the applicant to work with the Township and the City. The Township reaffirmed its approval of the request, and no additional comments were received from the City of Hanover.
- B. Gardner confirmed that she returned to the Township and reached out to Cindy Nash from Collaborative Planning on three separate occasions but did not receive a response. She explained that she was able to connect with Jennifer Nash earlier today, and they discussed the noted access through the River Landing development for water and sewer, which would be approximately 3,200 feet away.
- C. Greninger questioned whether it is known why Otten (with the Township) voted against the request, with Mol responding that if it is not noted in the Township's documents, the reason would be unknown.
- D. Holland asked Gardner whether the request had been brought before the City of Hanover Council. Gardner stated that she believed the proper protocol was to contact Cindy Nash of Collaborative Planning, as that office authored the original letter. Gardner confirmed that she spoke with Jennifer Nash earlier today and could provide email correspondence if the Commission so desired.
- E. No public comments.
- F. Mol clarified with Gardner that the request remains for a shared driveway with a three-parcel split. Gardner stated that the shared driveway is required per the ordinance.

- G. Bravinder read the October 8 email from Rockford Township and asked Gardner when she attended the Township meeting. Gardner explained that it would have been shortly after the October Commission meeting, which she believes was on October 7. It was confirmed that the Township's response reaffirmed its agreement with the alignment.
- H. Felger moved to recommend approval to the County Board of Commissioners to rezone tax parcel 215-000-031108, from General Agriculture (AG) to Urban/Rural Transition (R-1) because we find the property is aligned with the goals and policies of the Northeast Quadrant Land Use Plan and the Township approves. Motion seconded by Bravinder.

VOTE: Bravinder, Borrell, Holland, Greninger & Felger    NAY: Mahlberg & Mol

MOTION CARRIED

2. **GEORGE & DEBRA HATFIELD** – New

LOCATION: xxxx 80<sup>th</sup> St NW and Baker Ave NW – Part of the SE1/4 of the SE 1/4 in Section 23, Township 121, Range 26, Wright County, Minnesota. (Maple Lake Twp.) Tax #210-100-234404, 210-100-234405, 210-100-234407.  
Property Owner: GEORGE P & DEBRA A HATFIELD

Petitions to rezone the properties from Suburban Residential-a (R2-a) to Suburban Residential (R-2), as regulated in Sections 155.028, 155.050 & 155.051, Title XV, Land Usage & Zoning of the Wright County Code of Ordinances.

Present: George and Debra Hatfield

- A. With property maps displayed, Rhineberger reviewed the request. The request is to rezone three properties, currently zoned Suburban Residential-A (R-2A), to Suburban Residential (R-2). If the rezoning is approved, the applicant would apply for a five-lot platted subdivision. The property has been through a number of hearings, including the rezoning hearing to R-2A, as well as several subdivision hearings, with the most recent held in 2018 to reconfigure property lines. The property is designated as Residential Large Lot in the Land Use Plan. Maple Lake Township has approved the rezoning request. The County Highway Department has responded, indicating they will allow only one access to the westerly lot, and that all lots fronting Baker Avenue must access from Baker Avenue. Two negative comments were received from neighbors opposing the rezoning..
- B. D. Hatfield reminded the Commission that perk tests had been completed for each proposed parcel.
- C. Public Comment.
- Kyle Simonson – Lives next door. He stated he is against the request, explaining that he and his family moved to the area five years ago with the understanding that nothing less than five acres would be allowed. They chose the area for privacy and space. He expressed concern about disturbance to area wetlands and said the smaller lots would change the neighborhood's landscape. He added that if smaller lots are approved, there would be nothing preventing him from dividing his own six acres. He concluded by reiterating his opposition to the request.
  - Tonya Austin – Recently purchased the property adjacent to the one in question. She stated that they moved less than two months ago with the expectation of leaving the city for a rural lifestyle. They are very concerned about the request to create smaller lots and purchased their home with the assumption that five-acre lots were the minimum. She echoed concerns about the impact on the area's character and wetlands.
- D. Mol asked to view the Land Use Plan and questioned the planned designation for the area. Rhineberger displayed and explained that the area is identified as Residential Large Lot in the Plan. He directed the Commission to item D in the staff report, which specifies the language regarding appropriate zoning and applicable situations.
- E. Greninger clarified that the five-acre minimums in the area are due to the Land Use Plan, not because of any association requirements. Mol confirmed there is no association and the 5 acres is strictly based on the Land Use Plan.
- F. G. Hatfield pointed out on the displayed Land Use Plan map a neighboring parcel that is 2.5 acres, as well as other parcels in the vicinity ranging from 1 to 7.5 acres. D. Hatfield pointed out another parcel that recently became 2.5 acres. Mol asked if those parcels are Lots of Record. Rhineberger noted that the two parcels to the west were approved by the Commission in 2023 or 2024 as a two-lot subdivision.
- G. Mol asked if the Commission would like to view the site. Bravinder stated he recalls the area and does not need to see it.

- H. Mahlberg noted that there is a point to consider regarding the rezoning of the parcel to the west. That situation was slightly different, as one of the lots maintained roughly six acres, unlike what is proposed here. He added that the standard the Commission must find involves determining whether there are environmental considerations or development trends that justify a rezoning change. He questioned whether one prior rezoning nearby, which left a large lot, establishes a trend. He stated he is unsure he agrees but acknowledged that it is not far from the current site.
- I. Borrell stated that, without referencing the ordinance, he feels that large lots of five to seven acres can be difficult to maintain. In some cases, 2.5-acre lots are better maintained and create a more attractive neighborhood environment. He added that smaller lots can be more manageable and practical.
- J. Mol asked what size shed would be allowed on a 2.5-acre lot compared to a five-acre lot. Rhineberger explained that lots between 2.5 and 4.99 acres are allowed up to 3,200 sq. ft. of accessory structures, and lots between 5 and 9.99 acres are allowed up to 4,000 sq. ft. Mol commented that, in his experience with the Board of Adjustment, applicants on smaller lots often need larger sheds for storage, leading to frequent variance requests for a few hundred additional square feet. He suggested that this is something to consider.
- K. D. Hatfield addressed the wetland concerns. She stated that since 1988, they have greatly enjoyed the wetlands and the nature they provide. Rhineberger reminded the Commission that, with a platted subdivision, a wetland delineation will be required as part of the plat and will include public drainage and utility easements. He noted that some areas will likely be limited for improvements due to wetland boundaries.
- L. Bravinder stated that, given the wetland issues, it might be beneficial for the Commission to conduct a site visit.
- M. Bravinder moved to continue the item to the November 20<sup>th</sup> meeting so that a site inspection can be completed.  
Motion seconded by Greninger.

VOTE: CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

3. **BENJAMIN SIMON** – New

LOCATION: 2612 STATE HIGHWAY 55 SE - PRT OF W1/2 OF SE1/4 in Section 04, Township 119, Range 25, Wright County, Minnesota. (Rockford Twp.) Tax #215-100-044204. Property Owner: LEE A & MARIAN E WALDON REVTR

Petitions to rezone the properties from General Business (B-2) to General Industry (I-1), as regulated in Sections 155.028, 155.054 & 155.055, Title XV, Land Usage & Zoning of the Wright County Code of Ordinances.

Present: Benjamin Simon

- A. Rhineberger displayed property details, including zoning, the Land Use Plan, and an aerial photo of the area, as he reviewed the request. The property is 1.63 acres in size and located between Highway 55 and Chamberlain Avenue. The request is to rezone the property from B-2 (General Business) to I-1 (General Industry) with the intent to apply for an Interim Use Permit (IUP) for a contractor's yard. The property is designated as commercial in the Land Use Plan and is currently zoned B-2. Rockford Township has approved the request, and two neighboring property owners submitted comments in opposition.
- B. Simon noted that during his initial conversation with the County, they reviewed his project narrative and agreed that much of it falls within B-2 zoning allowances. However, the contractor's yard component for material storage requires a zoning change. The intent is to store extra materials, both for sale and for use by installation crews, in the rear portion of the property. Simon explained that he plans to install a privacy fence, with the goal of keeping materials and trucks behind the building to maintain a clean appearance along Highway 55. He also noted that Rockford Township indicated the business fits appropriately within the area.
- C. Bravinder questioned whether the driveway off Chamberlain Avenue would remain in use or be closed off. Simon stated that he had not yet decided but was open to discussing it with neighbors if it is a concern.
- D. Public comment.
  - Steve Waddell – a neighboring property owner directly behind the site – stated that his main concern would be addressed with the proposed privacy fence. He added that closing the Chamberlain Avenue driveway would be ideal, as the road is frequently used by walkers, animals, and horse riders. Waddell also expressed concern over increased traffic and safety issues, noting that a nearby trailer sales business has seen a significant rise in traffic.
  - Rory Demesy – owns property directly west of the site – stated that he holds an easement through the subject property for access to Highway 55. He asked that his access not be blocked or impacted. Demesy expressed support for the rezoning request overall, with his only concern being the driveway and easement access.
  - Rebecca Waddell – lives directly behind the property – expressed concern about after-hours activity and potential noise associated with material handling, as well as traffic impacts.
- E. Rhineberger explained that most of the concerns raised would be addressed during the IUP phase of the process. The current request pertains solely to the rezoning. If the rezoning is not approved, the type of business proposed would not be permitted.
- F. Simon acknowledged the concerns and stated that he is willing to block off the rear exit. He further explained his fencing plan and confirmed that the easement would not be affected. Simon also stated that he is willing to agree to a reasonable end time for operations.

- G. Bravinder asked whether a written easement is in place. Rory Demesy returned to the podium and confirmed that the easement is perpetual and recorded on the property deed.
- H. Bravinder moved to recommend approval to the County Board of Commissioners to rezone tax parcel 215-100-044204, from B-2 - General Business to I-1 - General Industry, because we find the property is aligned with the goals and policies of the Northeast Quadrant Land Use Plan and the Township approves. Motion seconded by Felger.

VOTE: CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

4. **R2T2 Properties LLC** – New

LOCATION: 3531 Cty Road 3 NW – PART OF THE SE 1/4 OF THE NW 1/4 AND THE WEST 30 ACRES OF THE NE 1/4 OF THE SW 1/4 ALONG WITH PART OF THE N 1/2 OF THE NW 1/4 OF THE SW 1/4 ALSO WITH E 20 RDS OF N 48 RDS OF NE 1/4 OF SW 1/4 in Section 15, Township 120, Range 28, Wright County, Minnesota. (French Lake Twp.) Tax #209-000-152400 & 209-000-153103 & 209-000-152301. Property Owner: R2T2 Properties LLC

Petitions for an Interim Use Permit for an 8-acre outdoor storage space to include a laydown yard, shipping containers, semi-trailers, to store cooling towers from commercial buildings and other like electrical equipment, as regulated in Sections 155.031 & 155.055, Title XV, Land Usage & Zoning of the Wright County Code of Ordinances.

Present: Randy Reinert

- A. Rhineberger displayed the site plan and reviewed the request. This request is for an Interim Use Permit (IUP) for a roughly 8 acre storage yard to be leased to another business for storage of electrical equipment in transit. Both on trailer and off. There is some screening already in place on the south side of the road, but screening is something he encouraged the Commission to discuss due to the vicinity of residential lots. The property's been through a number of hearings with the most recent one for was for an expansion, which includes a new building on the site. The Township has approved the Highway Department has no concerns with the request in terms of where that driveway access is going to be located.
- B. Reinert stated he did not have any additional comments.
- C. Mol questioned the plans for screening. Reinert stated that along Highway 37 there is an existing berm approximately 4–5 feet high, along with some elevation difference between the road and the property, with the property sitting lower than the road. With the site plan displayed, Reinert pointed out the low area and existing berm location.
- D. Public comment.
  - Marvin Lahti – Voiced concerns regarding visibility along County Highway 3 and potential hazardous waste. He stated he was unsure what would be stored and what the environmental impacts might be. He also raised aesthetic concerns along County Road 3 and questioned potential effects on property values.
- E. Reinert stated there will be no hazardous waste stored on-site, as all items are drained prior to arrival. The items consist of cooling towers from commercial demolitions that are dismantled elsewhere, with electronic components sold off-site. He emphasized that no dismantling will occur at this location. Reinert also noted that their property, French Lake Auto Parts, is already required to perform quarterly water sampling, and this area is covered under that same permit. He added that visibility from Highway 3 should not be an issue because the site is located approximately 700 feet back from the road. Mol confirmed that activities along County Road 3 pertain to the existing, already permitted business.
- F. Bravinder stated he drives by the location frequently and can see into the field along Highway 37. He noted the berm does not completely block visibility of the site; however, because the existing business has been in operation for many years, he does not expect a significant change in the property's overall appearance. Reinert stated that the business model and lease agreement address the concerns mentioned.
- G. Mahlberg confirmed that the ordinance requires screening and that it is mandatory. Rhineberger read the ordinance verbatim: *where are any business structure, parking or storage is adjacent to property zoned or developed for residential use that business or shall provide screening along the boundary of the residential property. Screening shall also be provided where a business parking lot or industry is across the street from a residential zone, but not on*

*that side of a business or industry considered to be the front. As determined by the zoning administrator.* Mahlberg asked which side of the property is considered the front. Rhineberger stated that the front is along Highway 3, at the access location. Mahlberg asked about the berm's height and vegetation; Reinert confirmed there are some trees and vegetation in place. Mahlberg suggested a condition requiring that vegetation be maintained with shrub-like plants to ensure adequate screening.

H. Public comment.

- Marvin Lahti – Stated that while the current use involves automobiles, the addition of storage containers and semi-trailers would create a different and less appealing aesthetic.
- I. Borrell asked if the proposed use would create additional noise. Reinert replied that it would not, as loading and unloading will occur only during regular business hours. Borrell mentioned that backup alarms (“beepers”) could create noise, and Reinert responded that it would be no different from the existing operation’s equipment.
- J. Mahlberg asked whether the stored items would require a Class 5 surface. Reinert stated that the clay surface will be covered with crushed granite or Class 5 material, but the existing topography will remain. The west side of the property is designed to contain water as part of the existing stormwater permits.
- K. Mol asked if there would be any changes to lighting. Reinert stated there would be none.
- L. Felger asked if there is a current entrance where the proposed driveway is located, and Reinert confirmed there is. Felger then asked about site security and whether a gate would be installed. Reinert stated the plan includes chain-link fencing in various areas to secure the property.
- M. Bravinder moved to approve an Interim Use Permit for an 8-acre outdoor storage space to include a laydown yard, shipping containers, semi-trailers, to store cooling towers from commercial buildings and other like electrical equipment, based on the plans, narrative, and discussion at this hearing, with the following conditions: 1) On the existing berm, along County Road 37, vegetation must be maintained and continually grown; 2) The use is limited to the area defined in the submittal; 3) Any additional lighting must be directed downward and toward the interior of the property, away from neighboring residences, and pose no impact to traffic on County Road 3 and 37; 4) Township to review in one year, with subsequent reviews at an interval established by the Township; 5) This permit shall immediately and automatically expire upon transfer, termination of any lease agreement, or change in business operations or ownership, with the exception of the initial transfer to the applicant or applicant's business. Motion seconded by Borrell.

*DISCUSSION: Borrell stated the screening requirement should be more specific, suggesting that vegetation must be at least 3–4 feet tall. Bravinder noted that if the vegetation is to be defined beyond existing conditions, the description should be more precise. Mahlberg suggested a simple requirement for shrub or shrub-like vegetation rather than just grass.*

Bravinder and Borrell agreed to amend Condition 1 to read: Shrub-like vegetation on the south berm, along County Road 37, must be established and maintained

*DISCUSSION: Rhineberger then suggested adding Condition 6 to clarify that no dismantling of equipment associated with this use may occur on-site. Bravinder asked if this was already covered in the narrative; Rhineberger confirmed it was but recommended explicitly stating it in the motion.*

Bravinder and Borrell agreed to add: Condition 6) dismantling of equipment associated with this use is prohibited on-site.

VOTE: CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY



Note: At this point in the meeting, Commission Member Patrick Mahlberg recused himself from the dais.

5. **XCEL ENERGY** – New

Present: Tim Mauseth with Xcel Energy and Zach Moen with Loucks Engineering

LOCATION: 14772 COUNTY ROAD 8 NW - S1/2OF NW1/4 & TH PRT OF NW1/4 OF NW1/4WH LIES SLY OF SLY R/W LN OF I-94 in Section 21, Township 122, Range 26, Wright County, Minnesota. (Silver Creek Twp.) Tax #216-100-212300. Property Owner: VORANDESOTO LLC

Petitions for a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) for a land alteration to include the movement of approximately 205,000 cubic yards of materials, which a total of approximately 28,000 is imported to the property for berms, drainage facilities, internal roads, and storage areas for a transmission line storage yard, as regulated in Sections 155.029, 155.055, 155.057 & 155.101, Title XV, Land Usage & Zoning of the Wright County Code of Ordinances.

- A. Rhineberger reminded the Commission that they should be very familiar with the property, as it has been before them a number of times over the past two years. Various proposed plans were displayed as Rhineberger reviewed the request details, noting that this request is part of a two-part proposal related to the next agenda item. This specific request is for a Land Alteration Permit involving approximately 205,000 cubic yards of material to be moved, with the intent of improving site drainage and supporting the stormwater management plan. The next item on the agenda pertains to an Interim Use Permit (IUP), and the materials displayed include details relevant to that as well. Silver Creek Township reviewed and approved the request when they considered the IUP in August. When asked about holding another hearing for the land alteration, the Township responded that they did not wish to conduct an additional hearing or make a separate recommendation, as their prior approval included some of the proposed earthwork. The County Highway Department commented that an access permit will be required along County Road 8.
- B. Mauseth reminded the Commission that he was before them roughly 60 days ago with the rezoning request, during which he described the proposed project vision. He reiterated that Xcel Energy remains excited about the project and is committed to the site's development. He stated that they have approached the project in a responsible and well-planned manner and intend to continue managing it that way.
- C. Public comment.
  - Johann Massmann – A Silver Creek Township resident and Loch Lake property owner. Mr. Massmann expressed several concerns, most of which he plans to address during the next agenda item. Regarding this request, he voiced concern about the extent of the proposed earth movement and stated that the drawings should show the potential road alignment area, should it occur in the future. He would like to see this factored into the plans to prevent future alignment issues. He also asked that 148th Street be removed from the proposed drawings, as it is his understanding that the Township will not allow its use as an access point.
- D. Mauseth stated that they intentionally left the area along 148th Street open to accommodate a potential future alignment. There are no plans to place anything in that area that would restrict or complicate a future realignment if it occurs. He acknowledged that direct access to 148th Street will not be permitted by the Township but explained that it was shown on the site plan solely as a potential future option, contingent upon an intersection realignment. Mol confirmed that a driveway access to 148th Street is not planned or anticipated for current use. Mauseth agreed, reaffirming that there are no plans to build an access at this time. Rhineberger added that the Land Alteration Permit application does not include an access point, but the overall site plan does show a potential future access. He noted that, as part of the IUP review, a condition could be included in an approval to specifically address this access concern.

- E. Bravinder asked how the wetlands to the east will be protected given the volume of material being moved. Mauseth responded that they deliberately avoided impacting the wetlands. Moen added that prior to any land disturbance, they will be required to obtain an erosion control permit from the state. The plan includes a double row of silt fencing, which will delineate the contractor's work limits. Using the earth movement plan, Rhineberger pointed out the locations of the silt fencing, berms, and retention ponds.
- F. Mol questioned how much material will be hauled onto the site. Moen stated that approximately 28,000 cubic yards will be hauled in, along with an additional 87,000 cubic yards of gravel. Rhineberger clarified that roughly half of the total material will be imported, while the remaining portion will come from on-site excavation of retention ponds and filtration basins. Bravinder asked whether the 87,000 cubic yards of aggregate are part of the construction phase or this specific permit. Rhineberger confirmed that it is included within the 205,000 cubic yards total, and Moen agreed, noting it should be reflected in the project narrative.
- G. Borrell moved to approve a Conditional Use Permit for a land alteration in accord with the plan submitted, prepared by Loucks Engineering, project number 250017, dated 10-02-2025, with the following conditions: 1) Activity must comply with all local, state, and federal permitting requirements and conditions; 2) Erosion control measures must be in place prior to any work commencing and remain in place until vegetative cover has been established; 3) Access permit must be approved by the Wright County Highway Department prior to any construction activity or earthmoving taking place. Motion seconded by Holland.

VOTE: CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

Note: At this point in the meeting, Commission Member Patrick Mahlberg recused himself from the dais.

6. **XCEL ENERGY** – New

LOCATION: 14772 COUNTY ROAD 8 NW - S1/2OF NW1/4 & TH PRT OF NW1/4 OF NW1/4WH LIES SLY OF SLY R/W LN OF I-94 in Section 21, Township 122, Range 26, Wright County, Minnesota. (Silver Creek Twp.) Tax #216-100-212300. Property Owner: VORANDESOTO LLC

Petitions for an Interim Use Permit for a commercial contractor's yard for transmission line storage, as regulated in Sections 155.031 & 155.055, Title XV, Land Usage & Zoning of the Wright County Code of Ordinances.

Present: Tim Mauseth with Xcel Energy and Zach Moen with Loucks Engineering

- A. Rhineberger displayed the proposed site plan and reviewed the request details. He reminded the Commission that the request is for a laydown yard for transmission services and related equipment, including poles and similar materials. Photos of a comparable yard were displayed. It was noted that no structures are included in the plan. The Township indicated that no access to 148th Street will be allowed. Overall, the Township has provided approval; the Highway Department noted that an access permit must be granted prior to the start of construction activity. No other written comments were received.
- B. No additional comments from Mauseth or Moen.
- C. Public Comment.
- Johann Massmann – Stated that he reviewed the staff report and acknowledged several positive elements but still had concerns. He felt the dust control plan appears adequate but remains a potential issue and suggested the IUP include a condition for review so that any issues arising within the next few years can be addressed. He expressed concern regarding fencing and screening, stating that the proposed 10-foot chain-link fence would not provide sufficient visual screening. He preferred a wood barrier fence, similar to what MnDOT has used in other areas, at least along the lake and residential sides of the property. He also raised concerns about safety backup alarms, recommending the use of directional backup alarms to minimize noise, and suggested that specific hours of operation be set but allow for the flexibility during storm or emergency response operations. Massmann further voiced concern about transformer storage, referencing past incidents in news reports. Given the site's proximity to the lake, he recommended that any transformers be stored off the ground and monitored closely. He also addressed the road alignment, stating that it should be identified on the plan and that responsibility for potential alignment costs should be clarified before development proceeds. He noted that other projects have been required to complete such improvements prior to development and felt this issue should be resolved now. Additionally, he suggested installing a security camera near the site access on County Road 8 so law enforcement could monitor accidents and traffic incidents, at least for the first few years of operation. He questioned how the Township's approval was determined, as he understood the vote on the rezoning was tied 4–4, and therefore he was unsure how it could be considered an approval. He requested that the matter be returned to the Township for reconsideration, suggesting that the Lake Association might also wish to provide input. Massmann concluded by saying he feels the process has been rushed and that the road alignment and spending responsibility are major concerns. He also requested that as a condition of approval that Xcel Energy relocate the existing storm siren from the road corner to their property and continue to cover its operational costs.
- D. Mauseth stated that dust control will be managed using crushed granite as the top six inches of the yard surface, a method used successfully at other sites. If dust remains an issue, a chemical suppressant could be applied. He said they are open to monitoring and welcome feedback during operations. Regarding fencing and screening, he explained that berms will be placed where appropriate, located on the roadside of the fence, and will include trees and vegetation for additional screening. The 10-foot chain-link fence is the standard used at most of their sites. In regard to safety

backup alarms, Mauseth stated that the company follows strict safety standards that are difficult to modify but noted that backup alarm noise tends to dissipate with distance. Hours of operation will be 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, with weekend work only during storm-related or emergency repairs. He stated that they support the concept of future road realignment, though he had no specific feedback regarding the storm siren. Mol asked about the potential for transformer storage. Mauseth clarified that no transformers will be stored on-site, as this location is intended only for transmission poles and line materials. Transformers are stored at other facilities where distribution crews operate, typically at sites with rail access. He stated that if they ever wished to store transformers at this site in the future, they understand they would need to return to the County to amend or reapply for the IUP.

- E. Borrell stated he is not familiar with the 148th Street realignment plans but knows the area. He felt it might make more sense for access to come from 148th Street, as vehicles would be traveling more slowly near Interstate 94. He asked for clarification on the realignment issue. Mol explained that the Township and local residents do not want access onto 148th Street unless the road is realigned. Wright County has granted access onto County Road 8. At this time neither the County nor the Township has agreed to fund the realignment. For this project, Xcel Energy has stated that access will be limited to County Road 8, but they are leaving room in the site layout to accommodate a future realignment if it is ever constructed. Borrell asked who is currently leading efforts for the realignment. Mol responded that no one is pursuing it at this time.
- F. Mauseth addressed the comment about security cameras at the gate. He stated the plan includes badge-controlled access with the possibility of cameras positioned around the site. Any employee accidents are reported internally, and he added that traffic-related incidents could easily be monitored and tracked through those systems.
- G. Public Comment.
  - Johann Massmann – Stated that he was certain the staff report mentioned transformer storage and wanted to ensure that was clearly addressed. Mol confirmed that it was clarified on the record that transformers will not be stored on-site, and that if that were to change, the applicant would be required to return for a new IUP.
- H. Bravinder moved to approve an Interim Use Permit for a commercial contractor's yard for transmission line storage that includes an outdoor storage area in accordance with the narrative, plans on file, and discussion, with the following conditions: 1) Signage on site must be in accordance with the County sign regulations; 2) Any lighting must be directed downward, toward the interior of the property, away from neighboring residences, and pose no impact to traffic on I94, County Road 8, or 148th St.; 3) Wetlands must not be disturbed, altered, or filled unless proper approval has been received by the Wright County SWCD; 4) Access is limited to County Road 8 ONLY, and an access permit must be approved by the Wright County Highway Department prior to any construction activity or earthmoving taking place; 5) The conditional use permit for the unplatted subdivision, granted in 2024, must be voluntarily revoked by either the current owner or applicant (once the applicant owns the property); 6) Township to review in one year, with subsequent reviews at an interval established by the Township; 7) This permit shall immediately and automatically expire upon transfer, except for the initial transfer to the applicant or applicant's business, termination of any lease agreement, or change in business operations or ownership. Motion seconded by Greninger.

*DISCUSSION: Rhineberger noted the narrative does mention the storage of transformers. Mauseth stated they are okay with that being prohibited.*

Bravinder and Greninger agreed to amend the motion to include Condition: 8) Transformer storage is prohibited.

VOTE: CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

Chairman Break 8:57 pm to 9:06 pm

7. **EMILY NEUHARTH – US Solar** – New

LOCATION: xxxx County Rd 8 NW – PRT OF N1/2 OF NW1/4 in Section 08, Township 120, Range 26, Wright County, Minnesota. (Maple Lake Twp.) Tax #210-000-082300. Property Owner: JOHN M & LOIS J WURM REVTR

Petitions for an Interim Use Permit to allow the construction of a 3 MW solar energy farm, as regulated in Sections 155.031, 155.048, 155.057 & 155.108, Title XV, Land Usage & Zoning of the Wright County Code of Ordinances.

Present: Emily Neuharth

- A. Rhineberger displayed maps of the property as he described the request. The property is located northeast of the 45th Street NW and County Road 8 intersection in Maple Lake Township and is approximately 30.38 acres. The property is located at the intersection of 148th Street and County Road 8 NW in Silver Creek Township. The parcel is currently zoned General Agriculture (AG) with a Residential-Recreational Shorelands District (S-2) designation related to Ramsey Lake, which is a DNR-designated recreational development lake. The property is designated in the Northwest Quadrant (NWQ) Land Use Plan as Rural Residential. The property is considered a “lot of record” and has one residential building entitlement attached to it. The proposed project will include approximately 16.4 acres of fenced land where the solar garden will be located, with access off 45th Street NW. An access road will be created through the property, with a proposed total of 6,526 photovoltaic solar panels for a 2.75 MW solar energy farm. The stormwater, landscaping, and vegetation management plans have been reviewed and approved by the Wright County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD). Maple Lake Township has recommended approval, and three neighbors have submitted comments in opposition to the request.
- B. Neuharth stated she represents US Solar, a company primarily dedicated to community solar, with over 100 projects in Minnesota. She noted that the landowners were unable to attend the meeting but are very supportive and excited about the project. She explained that the ordinance allows the project to operate for 30 years, which matches the proposed lease length. The surrounding fence will be agricultural farm-style and no taller than 8 feet, with panels rotating or tipping on a single axis to track the sun, fluctuating in height between 6 and 8 feet. The plan avoids two wetlands on the property and does not impact those areas. A natural gas pipeline runs through the middle of the site, and US Solar has coordinated with Northern Natural Gas Company to avoid the easement area. US Solar worked closely with SWCD to ensure the plans meet all requirements. The site will feature native, pollinator-friendly grasses and wildflowers to promote drainage and reduce runoff. Neuharth emphasized that the property owner has the right to develop the project, it complies with the ordinance, and both SWCD and Maple Lake Township have approved it.
- C. Public comment – Mol asked the public to keep comments to 3–4 minutes and avoid repetition.
- Chiemi Eley – Eley stated she only recently received notice about the solar farm and had little time to research. She moved to the area 20 years ago for quiet space and wildlife. Her home, located about 500 feet from the proposed site, will face the solar farm, which she finds unsettling. She expressed concerns about runoff, glare affecting traffic, increased construction traffic, and disturbance to wildlife. She noted that Canadian geese regularly fly over the land en-route to Ramsey Lake and that the solar farm would disrupt her sunrise view. While supportive of renewable energy, she feels the location is inappropriate.
  - Diane Pruett – Pruett, who lives on the southwest edge of the property where County Road 8 and 45th Street meet, asked whether runoff from the site could create drainage issues on her lower-lying land.

- Tara Howard – T. Howard owns two parcels adjacent to the property on the northwest side. They also own property that runs along County Road 8 and past 45th Street, with their main parcel serving as their primary residence. The project borders their land for roughly 1,500 feet, which she noted is a significant amount. She reviewed several concerns and requested clarification before any decision is made. Her first concern was that the documentation provided for the meeting stated that no drain tiles exist; however, there is a failed culvert along the field edge that resulted in an active PVC drainage system discharging into the ditch line and eventually into Ramsey Lake. The system was installed by prior owners to manage field drainage, and she is concerned that its existence and potential impact on water management have not been acknowledged. (Photos of the culvert and PVC system were provided to staff.) She next noted an ownership error in the documentation, which incorrectly listed ownership for the parcel ending in -1401. That parcel changed hands in 2024. Howard also questioned the proposed entrance location, pointing out that one plan shows the access crossing their property line without consent. She further noted discrepancies between various documents regarding the solar panel layout and expressed concern about the proximity to her property and the resulting visual impact. She requested additional clarification on setback requirements, particularly those relating to residential property lines and structures, as the proposed layout appears to encroach on her property. In addition to visual and environmental impacts, she questioned the effectiveness of the proposed visual buffer, noting that the plan includes red cedars that will take years to mature, leaving residents and motorists exposed to visual disruption during that time. Regarding the perimeter fence, she asked what the maintenance obligations will be. She also expressed concern about disruption to wildlife corridors and habitats between Ramsey and Maple Lakes. Furthermore, she stated that the soil and water monitoring plans in the documentation appear unclear. In regard to long-term use and decommissioning, Howard noted confusion about how the ordinance allows for a 30-year operation while the lease is for 25 years with three possible five-year extensions. She requested clarification on the required time frame and process for decommissioning and site restoration if the lease ends or equipment fails. She also raised concerns about potential contamination from aging equipment and asked what monitoring and protection protocols would be in place. Finally, Howard stated that property value and tax impacts have not been addressed and that the proposed use is atypical for the area, likely resulting in a negative impact. In conclusion, due to inaccuracies and inconsistencies, such as those related to drainage infrastructure and unresolved environmental, visual, and property concerns, she requested that the proposal be denied or deferred until these matters are fully addressed.
  - Matthew Howard – M. Howard asked whether the township was required to notify residents of the hearing. Mol replied that it was not. He shared concerns about visibility, stating nearby solar farms remain visible despite screening, and that fencing is proposed about 30 feet from his property line.
  - Tara Howard (follow-up) – She added that a culvert exists on the railroad side of the property and that watershed issues appear inadequately addressed.
  - Alison Tetz – Tetz noted that not all neighboring property owners received notification and questioned whether CP Rail had been contacted. She expressed concern about glare affecting train operators and drivers, citing two past railroad accidents caused by sunlight. She also raised property value concerns.
- D. Neuharth stated that she appreciates the community's engagement and noted that several valid concerns were raised. She went on to address the main points discussed. A major concern expressed was related to runoff and drainage, which she noted is a significant part of the application process. The stormwater management plan was thoroughly reviewed and discussed. She referenced a USDA study that found native perennial vegetation reduces runoff by approximately 37% compared to row crops. Therefore, with the establishment of perennial native grassland and wildflowers on the solar farm, there should be less runoff than under current agricultural use. Another concern mentioned was noise. Neuharth explained that solar gardens are very quiet neighbors, noting that she had spoken with

a landowner near another solar garden who reported a positive experience. She also addressed concerns about glare, acknowledging it as valid, especially with the panels' movement. The solar panels used have an anti-reflective coating that minimizes glare. Current panels on the market reflect only about 2% of sunlight, and single axis tracking panels have even less glare than fixed panels. Regarding construction, Neuharth stated that the goal is to minimize disruption and be a good neighbor. Construction is expected to take approximately six to nine months, with completion targeted for late 2026 if the project is approved. She acknowledged that wildlife impacts are a valid concern, particularly given the property's location between two lakes. However, she noted that deer are capable of jumping an 8-foot fence, and wildlife generally find ways to move around such barriers. The fence will be agricultural in style to blend with the surrounding area, consistent with fencing used in other agricultural communities. The native grassland will also promote habitat for pollinators, birds, and other wildlife. Drainage tiles were mentioned, and while it is her understanding that there are none on the property, she could not speak to larger culverts or infrastructure along the edges. She confirmed that the stormwater management plan accounts for water flow across the property and includes a stormwater basin. The plan was designed and reviewed by experienced engineers to ensure proper water management. Neuharth next addressed property values, citing a study that analyzed solar farms in other states and found no evidence of positive or negative impacts on nearby property values. A similar study conducted in Chisago County examined a 100 MW solar project between 2016 and 2017 and found that the sale of 15 properties adjacent to the solar array showed no adverse effect on property values. Regarding fencing and weed maintenance, she explained that US Solar has a maintenance team responsible for mowing the site several times each summer. Addressing concerns about chemicals, she argued that agricultural operations typically have a greater chemical impact on soil than solar installations. In contrast, native perennials will help restore and protect the soil over the coming decades. Decommissioning, she added, is a valid concern and is addressed in both the project lease and county ordinance. A financial surety agreement is required to cover the cost of decommissioning and site restoration. On the topic of leaching, or chemicals from solar panels entering the soil, Neuharth stated that numerous studies have examined the materials used in solar panels and found that the most common types pose minimal risk of leaching at any point in their life cycle. Regarding potential impacts on the railroad, she said no issues are anticipated. She reiterated that the solar farm will be limited to the property in question and that the landowners are enthusiastic and supportive of the project. Neuharth concluded by noting that the project meets all county requirements and that the property owners have the right to pursue this type of development on their land.

- E. Borrell stated that he has personal experience living next to a solar farm in Waverly. His farm is located adjacent to a solar installation that was developed a few years ago. When the land was previously used for crops, large rain events caused black soil to wash onto his property from the adjacent field. Since the solar farm was built, that runoff no longer occurs. The vegetation on the site is well-established and regularly maintained. He noted that, while he may personally prefer to see crops growing in the field, he and his neighbors also recognized that the property could have been developed commercially or as a housing subdivision. They are pleased that the solar farm ensures the land will remain as it is for at least 25 years. He described the solar farm as being "the quietest neighbors you could have," noting that aside from some temporary construction noise, the area has been peaceful. Borrell emphasized that runoff is now nonexistent. He added that, given the site's proximity to town, the property would likely be annexed into Maple Lake within 30 years and potentially converted into a housing development. He stated that he would prefer solar panels to a housing development and has not experienced any issues with glare. He concluded by reiterating that drainage is no longer a problem and expressed strong support for solar farms as neighbors, stating he "can't say enough good things" about the experience. While it would be ideal to preserve farmland for crops, he said, future annexation would likely lead to housing, which would generate far more complaints than a solar installation.
- F. Bravinder asked how many interconnection poles would be located along 45th Street and what type of infrastructure would be used, specifically wondering if bus boxes could be installed instead of poles. Neuharth responded that there would be three poles on the property, which would connect to a three-phase power line running west and then north along County Road 8. She noted that Xcel Energy will be expanding its three-phase line and already has an interconnection agreement in place. Bravinder confirmed that there would be four poles in the area and asked whether

the number of poles could be reduced by using bus boxes. Neuharth explained that she is not an engineer and that Xcel Energy has specific design and approval processes. Her understanding is that the current plan will remain as proposed, and she was not aware of any discussions regarding the use of bus boxes. Bravinder commented that it would be a worthwhile discussion to have. He noted that the poles located inside the property line would belong to US Solar, not Xcel, and recalled that other solar companies in the past have switched to using bus boxes instead of poles. He reiterated his request to know whether poles could be replaced with bus boxes. Nikki Miller, a developer with US Solar, clarified that the interconnection point in question involves three to four poles, but US Solar does not control what Xcel Energy uses to connect the solar array to the grid. She stated that US Solar would prefer not to use three poles but must follow Xcel's engineering requirements. Borrell confirmed that the only poles proposed are those shown on the site plan. He noted that the solar farm near his home has between six and eight poles rather than ground-mounted systems. Bravinder commented that solar farms near his property typically have only one pole, with the remainder using ground-mounted equipment, which is why he questioned the higher number of poles for this project. Miller explained that this is the first time the program has allowed a project over 1 MW in size. Even for 1 MW projects, Xcel has required three poles at the interconnection point, and that standard has remained consistent across all projects. She said she was unsure of the exact reasoning but noted that it is how Xcel engineers its sites. Rhineberger added that county regulations allow one pole per megawatt, plus one general utility pole, with poles located in the right-of-way excluded from that count. In this case, the collection pole is within the right-of-way, meaning a total of four poles are allowed, with three proposed. He noted that the Commission does have the authority to limit the number of poles on the site. Bravinder expressed that the information seemed somewhat conflicting compared to what he had learned in the past. Miller stated that if the Commission were to restrict the number of poles, the project would not be able to move forward.

- G. Felger recalled that the determination of whether poles or ground boxes are used is made by Xcel Energy's engineers, not by the solar developers. He asked whether Xcel could be encouraged to reduce the number of poles, noting that in earlier projects, some sites ended up with what he described as "a forest of poles." Miller responded that in the early stages of solar development, it was common to see numerous poles. She said US Solar has consistently pushed back on Xcel about this issue and agrees that excessive above-ground infrastructure is not ideal. However, she is unsure why Xcel continues to require that number of poles for interconnection. Felger observed that three poles are proposed for this project and asked how many additional poles might be located in the immediate area or within the right-of-way. Miller clarified that there will be a single pole in the right-of-way to connect to Xcel's system and tie into the existing three-phase line. Felger noted that it had been mentioned Xcel is improving the existing three-phase line and asked whether there is already a line along County Road 8. Miller explained that the project site was selected because of the existing three-phase line, but she was unsure whether a new line would need to be installed to complete the connection. Neuharth added that her understanding is that the existing line along County Road 8 will be upgraded and extended over to 45th Street. Felger confirmed that this upgrade would involve converting the current single-phase line to a three-phase line. Miller further explained that community solar projects are required to connect to a three-phase line, which is the reason Xcel plans to perform the upgrade. She noted that if the project does not move forward, the line will not be upgraded.

#### H. Public Comment

- Matt Howard noted that the gated entrance shown on the project plans is located on his property. Rhineberger clarified that the plan has since been updated and that the proposed access point in that location would not be permitted due to the delineated wetland. The revised site plan shows the new, approved access location. Mr. Howard also raised concerns about a drain tile that runs beneath his property and discharges into the ditch along County Road 8. He stated that if the tile were disrupted during construction, it could cause flooding on his property, and he asked whether such an issue could be remediated. Mol requested clarification on the drain tile's path. Mr. Howard explained that the tile originates in the field behind his property, runs through the area where the solar project is proposed, and empties into the County Road 8 ditch. Aerial imagery from Beacon was used during the discussion to



clarify the location in question. Mr. Howard reiterated his concern and expressed hope that the project would not cause future flooding on his property.

- I. Felger asked how existing drain tiles would be handled during construction. Neuharth responded that if any drain tiles are damaged, they will be repaired. She emphasized that US Solar has no intention of disrupting existing infrastructure and that the construction team is highly experienced, noting that drain tile management is a common consideration in Minnesota projects. She added that if an issue were to arise years later, property owners could notify US Solar to have it addressed. Felger then asked whether the drain tiles would be located prior to the start of construction. Miller explained that field studies are conducted as part of the wetland and site assessments to identify any existing drain tiles. While the team does its due diligence to locate them in advance, she noted that occasionally tiles are discovered during construction, in which case they are repaired or managed appropriately at that time.
- J. Felger moved to continue the matter to the November 20, 2025, Planning Commission hearing for a site inspection. Motion seconded by Holland.

VOTE: CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

8. **EMILY NEUHARTH – US Solar** – New

LOCATION: xxxx Nevens Ave NW – 23.88 AC SE1/4 OF NE1/4 in Section 35, Township 121, Range 28, Wright County, Minnesota. (Southside Twp.) Tax #217-000-351401. Property Owner: MVP DEVELOPMENT LLC

Petitions for an Interim Use Permit to allow the construction of a 3 MW solar energy farm, as regulated in Sections 155.031, 155.048, 155.057 & 155.108, Title XV, Land Usage & Zoning of the Wright County Code of Ordinances.

Present: Emily Neuharth with US Solar

- A. Rhineberger displayed the proposed site plans and reviewed the request. The property is 23.88 acres, located on 67th St. and County Road 183. The request is for a 3 MW solar energy farm on a property currently zoned as General Agriculture (AG) and in the Land Use Plan as Agricultural, with a portion of the property within 1,000 ft. of Lake John. The Wright County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) has reviewed and approved the proposed plans. Southside Township has recommended approval of the request. Public comment was received expressing considerations and caution, while another property owner submitted a letter in support of the project. The City of Annandale submitted a comment requesting additional consideration and conditions, as the property is part of their long-range plan. Rhineberger noted the property is not identified in the LUP as a transition area but is apparently included in the City's plan as residential. The Lake John Association submitted comments, which were included in the staff report.
- B. Neuharth reiterated that the request is for a 3 MW solar project on 15.6 fenced acres. The plan includes agricultural fencing, anti-glare single-axis tracking panels, and will operate for 30 years per the ordinance and lease agreement. The property owners, who are in attendance, wrote a letter of support and purchased the property intending to maintain it as agricultural land rather than a housing development. Vegetative screening will be along the west and north sides of the project, with native pollinator-friendly habitat underneath, which reduces runoff, increases water infiltration into the aquifer, and enhances natural habitat. She emphasized the landowners' right to use their property within permitted uses, which this project complies with. She acknowledged the letter of concern from the Lake John Association and noted she spoke earlier in the week with its President. She also acknowledged a letter from a resident advocating for several project considerations, many of which, such as a vegetative buffer, are being addressed. One concern mentioned was the potential for chemicals entering Lake John; Neuharth argued that the absence of typical agricultural activities actually decreases the presence of chemicals commonly used in farming. The property owners are excited about the project, as it eliminates chemical use and provides pollinator-friendly ground cover that enhances biodiversity. They are also pleased that the land will be preserved as open space in an area facing rapid development pressure and secured as a solar farm for 30 years. Lastly, the landowners feel there will be minimal impact on bird populations, especially compared to other forms of development or energy production. Neuharth cited a USDA study showing that perennial vegetation reduces runoff by 37% compared to row crops. She clarified that "lake effect glare" might be confused with concentrated solar thermal plants, which act as reflective mirrors. This project's panels are designed to absorb light and reflect roughly 2% of sunlight, so lake effect glare will not impact birds. Neuharth reiterated that the applicant's plans are complete, comply with County ordinances, have SWCD approval, and have Southside Township's recommendation for approval.
- C. Public comment – Mol asked the public to keep comments to 3–4 minutes and avoid repetition.
- Kelly Kosloski – An Annandale resident living on Lake John, she voiced support for the solar field due to significant residential development in the area and its impacts. She supports property owners' rights under existing guidelines but expressed concerns about the screening and vegetation plan, suggesting it could be more robust. She noted that the establishment of vegetation, including seeds and plugs, takes time and requested a more detailed maintenance plan. Kosloski also suggested correcting a typo related to the Xcel

interconnection agreement to reflect Wright County. She reiterated support for the solar farm but emphasized the need for a detailed vegetative maintenance plan.

- Joleen Sytsma – Lake John Association President – Sytsma referenced the MN DNR Commercial Solar Guide, questioning whether the DNR had been involved or provided opinions. She highlighted that the guide recommends avoiding public waters, streams, rivers, and wetlands, noting a 2-mile buffer requirement between solar fields. She expressed concern for migratory, water-dependent birds near Lake John, emphasizing the importance of handling federally protected species appropriately. Sytsma also asked about potential expansions and questioned the infrastructure and number of poles for the area.
- John Bigalk – The only resident east of the project, he enjoys his western view and requested trees be planted on the east side. He praised the property owners as good stewards.
- Nathan Elam – Owns two properties on 67th Street. He expressed mixed emotions, appreciating the view of the fields but raising concerns about tree size and growth timeline. He preferred mature trees to be planted initially, questioned work hours, and expressed a preference against using goats to maintain vegetation. He asked about property access, which Rhineberger confirmed would be off 67th Street, as shown on the plan..
- Patty VanDorp, property owner – Clarified that the project aims to maintain a quiet environment with minimal disruption.

- D. Rhineberger stated that the DNR received public notice, similar to neighbors. The DNR receives copies of ordinances and amendments and is consulted throughout ordinance development and application review. Shoreland authority resides with the County, with state-provided rules and guidelines generally followed.
- E. Neuharth explained the establishment and management plan for vegetation, summarizing details from Appendix 8. She indicated that questions are addressed in the Vegetation Management Plan and confirmed that any future solar project expansion would require an additional parcel and a new IUP process. Access will be from 67th St., as the County road is not permitted. Vegetation takes several years to establish, typically starting at 4–6 ft. but she is unsure about Eastern Red Cedar growth rates. While US Solar sometimes uses sheep to maintain property, grazing is not planned here, as the site will be native prairie. She confirmed compliance with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and relevant local, state, and federal regulations.
- F. Mol questioned vegetation along the County Road. Neuharth stated it would require either a new IUP or edits to the site plan; she noted it might not provide uninterrupted screening but could be included. Mahlberg clarified that a new application is unnecessary and that a detailed condition could be included in approval. Neuharth agreed that a new site plan might be required for the eastern edge, while minor details may not need revision.
- G. Bravinder questioned the location of interconnection poles to the Xcel line. Neuharth explained that the connection was originally off the County Road but moved to 67th St., resulting in the east/west line shown on the plan that takes a turn north. Bravinder asked why Eastern Red Cedars were used. Neuharth explained that, while not a vegetation expert, she understands cedars are fast-growing and retain leaves; she volunteered to provide more details on selection, if the Commission would like.
- H. Felger asked about tying a 3-phase line along the County Road and potential Xcel upgrades. Neuharth stated that distribution line upgrades are typical but likely not extensive.

- I. Rhineberger addressed construction hours, noting the potential motion includes a limit of 7:00 am to 7:00 pm daily to minimize noise. The Commission may adjust hours or remove limits.
- J. Mol questioned whether the Commission would like to visit the site. He noted that a site inspection at this location would be different from the last item heard as many neighbors are present at the meeting, and their concerns have been addressed, so he questioned what would change in a month with a site inspection or what the Commission would want to see on a revised plan. He emphasized that the site inspection should be conducted with purpose. At this point, there is testimony from neighbors and property owners, with many of the concerns already addressed.
- K. Borrell moved to approve an interim use permit to locate a 3 MW solar farm in accord with the plans and narratives on file with the following conditions: 1) Panels to be mounted using the existing landscape conditions. Service roads are limited to what is shown on the plan. Noting all internal roads created will be created in a fashion to meet the standards of Subsection 155.108 (C) (12) of the Wright County Code of Ordinances; and minimize impacts needed to return the property back to a similar condition and use at the end of project life; 2) The applicant must follow the Vegetative Management Plan, as submitted and approved by the Wright County SWCD; 3) Proper building permits (along with any required State permits) are obtained prior to work being started on the site; 4) Construction hours will be limited to 7:00 am to 7:00 pm each day to limit noise; 5) Access to County Road 183 (Nevens Ave. NW) is prohibited. Permits to access 67th St. NW must be obtained from Southside Township and submitted to the Planning and Zoning Office prior to the issuance of any permit on the property; 6) Must conform to all setbacks, noting that current plans show it meets the setback requirements; 7) An agreement must be entered into with Wright County for decommissioning and financial surety in accord with Subsection 155.108 (14) (C) (a), (b), (c), and (d) of the Wright County Ordinance, which must include an approved decommissioning plan in accord with 155.108 (15) (g), and the decommissioning surety is on file with the Wright County Office of Finance and Tax Payer Services, prior to and construction activity taking place and prior to building permit issuance; 8) The agreement shall take into consideration any potential access road easement damages or Highway damages; 9) The interim use permit for Solar Energy Farms shall expire at the same time as the Solar Energy Farm lease, but in no case shall it exceed 30 years. At that time, the land must be returned to agricultural land; 10) The pole number and configuration on the plan must meet the requirements of one pole per 1 MW and one overall general on-site utility pole; 11) On-site internal power and communication lines shall be buried underground; 12) The applicant is responsible for assuring all final utility interconnection approvals are obtained and followed for this project, and before obtaining a building permit; 13) Township to review in one year, with subsequent reviews at an interval established by the Township; 14) If there are substantial changes to the plans submitted and approved, a new interim use permit hearing will be required; 15) The interim use permit shall expire, and all infrastructure shall be removed within 30 years, no later than 10/23/2055; 16) Tree plantings for screening are required, as generally noted on the plan with additional screening along the east side to follow spacing and species requirements as noted on the other areas of screening. Dead or diseased trees must be immediately replaced. Motion seconded by Holland.

*DISCUSSION: Rhineberger clarified that the eastern property line vegetation was sufficiently detailed for the Commission. Mahlberg stated that what was read meets his requirements, provided that staff is clear on what is expected. Rhineberger added that an updated plan could be submitted at the time of application. Mol confirmed that the motion, as read, was clear and required no additional details for the eastern screening.*

Borrell and Holland amended their motion to include, in condition 16, that the revised screening plan be submitted at the time of application.

*DISCUSSION: Mahlberg suggested that residents speak directly with the applicant regarding the vegetation and screening plans.*

VOTE: CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

9. **Ordinance Amendment 25-4** – New

The Wright County Planning Commission will be reviewing and discussing proposed amendments to the Wright County Code of Ordinances. Proposed amendments will be related to Subdivisions (Platted and Unplatted) and the Planned Unit Development (PUD) district.

- A. Rhineberger explained that Planning & Zoning was approached by the County Board and during the Revisor's meeting regarding adjustments to the PUD provisions and amendments to the Subdivision ordinances. The proposed amendment combines those two efforts, along with other general cleanup items. The subdivision section (Chapter 154), in particular, has not been updated since 1979. Some provisions are outdated or no longer followed, while others reflect current practices that should be formally included—similar issues exist within the PUD section.

He went on to explain each specific amendment:

- Correction of an incorrect reference to the Minnesota Shoreland Rules.
- Prohibition of common open space or commonly owned lots with lake or river frontage. Rhineberger referenced a recent development on Lake Ida, where common open space would have provided shared lake access to multiple lots without individual lakeshore ownership. This raised concerns among residents and elected officials at both the Township and County levels.
- Clarification of language regarding rounding principles related to density bonuses.
- PUD requests will be allowed to run concurrently with rezoning requests, rather than as separate processes. This change will provide a clearer, more efficient process.
- Replacement of the term "*preliminary development plat*" with "*preliminary plat*", which is the historically correct terminology.
- Amendment to allow common lots to be owned through fractional ownership. This addresses situations where a homeowners' association is not established or defaults, ensuring that each lot owner holds a proportional share of the common property and taxes are automatically collected.
- Numerous updates to the Subdivision Ordinance (Chapter 154) to modernize 1979 language and align definitions with those in Chapter 155.
- Amendment to the park and open space dedication requirement: it will be based on a per-lot amount rather than a percentage of raw land value. The amount per lot will be set by the County Board through the adopted fee schedule. The goal is to base the fee on the number of new residents created, not the amount of land developed.
- Correction to the County Board stamp requirement for plat approval—considered primarily a housekeeping change.
- Allowing performance sureties associated with platted subdivisions to be held by the local road authority instead of the County, as there is no reason for the County to hold a surety for a Township road when the Township is the acting road authority.

- B. No comments from the public.

- C. Felger stated that he had several questions and comments regarding the proposed ordinance document.

- Felger questioned the striking of the specific references to the Minnesota Shoreland Rules. Rhineberger explained that removing the numerical references prevents issues when the State revises its rules and numbering. The amendment still encompasses all State rules and subsequent updates.
- Felger asked for clarification regarding the prohibition on common areas or open space along lakes and rivers. He also asked whether Lake Ida has a public access. Rhineberger directed the question to Commissioner Holland, who stated that a main concern is ongoing maintenance responsibility for shared lakeshore.

Developers favor such access because it can increase property value, but residents often oppose it. Holland explained that on Lake Ida, the Lake Association opposed the development when common lake access was proposed but supported it once that element was removed. Mol added that the proposal would have allowed eight lots to share access, which raised concerns. Felger stated that he does not see an issue with boat traffic when public access is already available. Borrell mentioned Waverly Lake, questioning whether a development of 50–60 homes could have fractional lake access ownership or if limits would be imposed. Rhineberger clarified that the proposed ordinance would prohibit commonly owned lake access. Holland reiterated that the intent is to avoid creating unmaintained shared parcels and that property owners can use public access points. Mahlberg asked whether the language would read “shall not” or “must not” and whether applications could still be submitted if a PUD included shared access. Rhineberger stated that it would be an outright prohibition with no variance allowed. He further explained that private easements providing lake access for unplatted divisions are separate matters not regulated by this amendment or by Planning & Zoning.

- Felger asked for clarification on the rounding principles that will be used. Discussion among members and staff concluded that 0.5 and above will round up, and 0.4 and below will round down.
- Felger questioned the change from “preliminary development plat” to “preliminary plat.” Rhineberger explained that the term “preliminary development plat” has never been formally used and that this is simply a terminology cleanup.
- Felger referred to page 4, Section 14, of the amendments and asked about the statement regarding whether all lots are buildable. Rhineberger explained that in some PUDs, small vacant lots are created as part of the design, which this section addresses.
- Felger questioned Section 4 on page 8, item 8, stating that the language currently reads as if a property must support all types of septic systems. He suggested replacing “and” with “or” before “at-grade systems” to clarify that the property must support at least one of the listed system types. Rhineberger agreed to make the change.
- Felger addressed signatures on plats, noting currently there is only a place for the Planning Commission Chair to sign. He suggested adding the Vice-Chair as an authorized signatory in cases when the Chair is unavailable. Rhineberger clarified that approvals authorize the Chair’s signature without time restriction. If the Chair is unable to sign within a reasonable timeframe, the Vice-Chair could act with full responsibilities of the Chair in that instance.
- Felger pointed to page 13, the last item in the proposed document, and asked whether a subdivider has any right to appeal. Rhineberger explained that this amendment adds the local road authority to the process since they oversee local roads. The County does not inspect or regulate Township roads; if the road is County or State, those entities serve as the authority.

D. Bravinder moved to close the public hearing to all oral and written comment and recommend approval of Ordinance 25-4, with the added correction to Article 3, Section 4, #8 as noted by the discussion, to the Wright County Board of Commissioners. Motion seconded by Holland.

VOTE: CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

**SITE INSPECTION**

The Commission scheduled a site inspection for Monday November 17th, with the Commission to meet at 8:30 a.m. at the Government Center.

Meeting adjourned at 11:32 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Barry J. Rhineberger". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Barry Rhineberger  
Planning & Zoning Administrator  
BR:sd

cc: Planning Commission, Twp. Clerks