

**Summary of the
MEEKER COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION
May 10, 2022 – MEETING MINUTES**
Audio Available

The Meeker County Planning Commission held a meeting on **May 10, 2022 at 5:00pm** to consider the following Conditional Use permit application and other business before the Board. Present was Jans, Hempel, Euerle, Smith, Salzl, Turck, and Asst Zoning Administrator Ankrum.

5:00pm

Jans calls the meeting to order. There is a quorum. Les Loff is absent.

The Board states their names for voice recognition.

Jans asks the Board if they have any corrections or additions to the April 12, 2022 meeting minutes. None are noted.

Euerle makes a motion for approval.
Salzl seconds the motion.
Motion carried 6-0.

5:01pm

Jans opens the public hearing for Christopher Moyer, 33416 CSAH 2, Watkins, MN 55389. That part of the Southeast Quarter (SE ¼), more fully described in the application. Section Four (4), Township One Hundred Twenty (120), Range Thirty (30), Forest City Township. An application for a Conditional Use permit to operate a level 2 home occupancy auto repair shop in the A-1 Agricultural Preservation District.

Chris & Sheena Moyer present.

Ankrum: This property is a 65-acre parcel of A-1 Agriculture Preservation zoned land located at 33416 CSAH 2, Watkins, MN, in Section 4, Township 120, Range 30 in Forest City Township. Currently on this site is a house, garage and septic constructed in 2011. A 48' x 60' utility shed was installed in 2016.

The property owner has applied for a Conditional Use Permit as per section 11.03.G of the Meeker County Zoning Ordinance to operate a vehicle service shop. The business plan states that it will be a limited liability company, Moyer Automotive, LLC. With the owner as the only employee. The shop is a 48' x 60' stick built steel exterior, steel interior, insulated structure with concrete floors. There is a small light on the outside by the entry door and a flood light in the center of the shed front. The shop will have two hoists and alignment rack, tire machine, tire balancer and a brake lathe. The days of operation will be Monday through Friday with hours of operation from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm. Most jobs will be on an appointment basis with a small amount of drive-in repair work. The plan estimates approximately 12-20 vehicles per week will be worked on. Eight designated parking spaces and additional space in front of the shed will be designated for serviced vehicles. The shop is set back from the road far enough to not be visible to neighbors.

Turck says there is adequate parking, it is 64 acres. You can't see it from the road.

Jans says that it is hidden away.

Ankrum reads the conditions:

1. The property owner shall operate as per the business plan submitted with this application. The applicant shall be permitted a maximum of four (4) additional full-time employees.
2. Once this operation has employees beyond the principal residents of the existing dwelling, appropriate restroom facilities shall be installed in the structure or Mini-Biffs placed on the property to be utilized for the business.
3. The hours of operation to the public shall be Monday through Friday 7:00 am to 6:00 pm. No operation on Sundays or holidays.
4. Service building area cannot exceed 12,000 square feet.
5. A maximum of ten (10) items waiting for repair/pickup may be stored outside on-site at any time.
6. There shall be no on street parking allowed. Off street parking shall be provided for employees, residents, and/or patrons. Six (6) minimum spaces plus one space for each 500 square feet of floor area over 1000 square feet of floor area will be provided. as per 22.18 of the Meeker County Zoning Ordinance.
7. The applicant/business must comply with all MPCA noise standards, which are 65 decibels during daytime operation.
8. All lighting used to illuminate any off-street parking area shall be arranged to reflect the light away from adjoining premises.
9. Signage placed on the property will be no larger than 40 square feet and placed according to ordinance regulations.
10. The applicant/business shall follow all required rules and regulations as are set forth in the Meeker County Zoning Ordinance.

Euerle asks about his plans for recycling.

Moyer states that he will get a dumpster for the steel. Tires will be brought to Crow Wing County Recycling. Plans to use some oil for heating, and all coolant will get recycled through St. Cloud. He will have a designated trailer for tires and a 55-gallon drum for coolant and waste oil.

The Board discusses hours of operation for the "public" with the Moyer's, so it doesn't handicap him being able to work. It is agreed upon to be 7am-6pm Monday through Friday. No operations on Sundays or Holidays.

Smith makes a motion to close the public hearing.

Hempel seconds the motion.

Motion carried 6-0.

Turck makes a motion for approval with the conditions.

Salzl seconds the motion.

Motion carried 6-0.

5:21pm

Jans states that the Board needs to approve the final plat for Swan Lake Estates Second Addition.

Hempel makes a motion for approval.

Smith seconds the motion.

Motion carried 6-0.

5:25pm

Hempel states that Wright County recently had an ordinance change on their solar ordinances and in response to that, Cokato put a one-year moratorium on mega solar fields. She believes Meeker County should also implement a one-year moratorium on them.

She recently learned that if two mega-watt solar gardens are put next to each other--within a mile--it is a big tax advantage. So, if you see one large garden go up, you will probably see another go up in the same area.

Smith says that they have to be able to get distribution rights. That is usually the hang-up.

Hempel says that since Wright County is making theirs more restrictive and Cokato is putting on a moratorium, Meeker County will probably start seeing applications for large solar gardens.

Turck asks why Meeker County wouldn't want them.

Hempel says that it doesn't benefit the county one bit. There is a temporary bump when the workers come, but there is not a tax advantage. There is no change in tax class. And the power isn't even used by the county. The solar panels are taking up Meeker County land and the power is going somewhere else.

Jans states that the power is going back to the main line—all of Meeker County is Xcel. So, anybody that is getting power from Xcel is using it. It just goes to the bigger distribution lines first.

Smith asks if we would be accused of discriminating against the land owner if they say they can do what they want with their land.

Hempel says that our ordinance book is exactly that—telling the landowner what they can do with their land. We need to look at the future.

Hempel is worried that the solar companies will be coming to Meeker County soon, so we need to get a moratorium done quickly.

Jans says that the Board spent last year discussing solar gardens and we put setbacks in the ordinances to handle it and to keep them away from towns and homes.

Hempel believes we respond only because we are pushed into something. We aren't proactive, we are reactive.

Jans states that the gardens that are not built yet are the ones that couldn't get an interconnection agreement with Xcel Energy. The Planning Commission can't impose moratoriums, the commissioners need to.

Hempel—We can get the ball rolling.

Jans—Are we going to be the ones to put the kabash to solar energy?

Hempel—Someone has to.

Jans—It would be nice if you could pick and choose what land gets used.

Hempel—We can change our ordinance. That's what our Board does—we decide. She understands that there is different ratings of land and landowners can get their taxes lowered by the type of soil they have.

Jans—I think there are five categories. How does tax work on a solar garden?

Hempel—I thought there was no change. I thought it was taxed as agricultural land.

Jans—I pay real estate taxes on every building on my land. I would guess the solar company would have to pay something for the structures.

Hempel—But they don't own the land.

Jans—Even so, then the farmer would have to pay something.

Turck—If it's leased, is the company that has the panels paying a state tax? The farmer is obviously making money on the amount they are getting paid.

Ankrum—Calls Amy Rausch, the Assessor for Meeker County. Do tax classifications change when a solar garden is put on farm land?

Rausch—Only when it goes over 1 mega watt. Then it would turn commercial and it would also get taxed differently by the state for wattage. Your classification would go commercial and you'd also get a tax bill—the state dictates how much depending on the wattage.

Hempel asks that the difference would be for ag and commercial.

Rausch—Commercial is usually 1.5%, but then you pay state general tax. If it's ag and homesteaded you'd be at .5%, so they will at least double or triple your taxes, when going commercial from ag.

Hempel—taking the state element out—what specifically is the effect on Meeker County? What would benefit Meeker County?

Rausch—unless I know the numbers, I can't tell you. If you take out the state general tax, then you are just looking at the class rate. If it's non-homestead ag it is 1%, homestead ag is .5%, commercial is 1.5-2%, that's just tax capacity. To know exactly what that will do to the county side of it, unless I have numbers, I can't tell you but it is substantial. It is only on the acreage that the solar panels are on.

Jans—now I know why they aren't building the big gardens.

Hempel—we could separate our ordinance for over 1 MW and under 1 MW. We know there's a benefit and a lot of it is state. It doesn't sound like it is that much on the county side—depends on the acres.

Jans—we don't have many solar gardens in Meeker County—probably 5 or 6.

6:08pm

Smith makes a motion to adjourn

Turck seconds the motion.

Motion carried 6-0.