

MEETING MINUTES
AUSTIN CITY PLANNING COMMISSION
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 10TH, 2020
AUSTIN CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS
5:30 PM:

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Michael Postma, Melissa Swenson, Jay Lutz, Karem Salas Ramirez, Aaron Stewart,

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Megan Burroughs, Jim Mino, Rita Srock

OTHERS PRESENT: City Attorney Craig Byram, Planning & Zoning Administrator Holly Wallace, Public

Commissioner Postma called the meeting to order at 5:30pm and asked if all commissioners have had a chance to review the minutes from the Tuesday, October 13th, 2020 meeting. Commissioner Lutz voted to approve the minutes. Commissioner Swenson seconded. All in favor, none opposed. Roll Call below. Motion carried.

Postma – Aye

Lutz – Aye

Stewart – Aye

Salas Ramirez – Aye

Swenson – Aye

Ayes – 5 Nays - 0

OPEN PUBLIC HEARING: To consider a previously tabled discussion for a petition from MinnSolar on behalf of Arlo Drees for a variance from the square footage of detached structures in an “R-1” Residential district, allowing for a ground-mounted solar array located on their property at 3806 5th Ave NW.

Ms. Wallace read through last month’s minutes. She then read an email from a neighboring property owner, Amanda Green, expressing concern about the aesthetics of the property.

MinnSolar representative Paul Kreidermacher spoke stating that on 10/21 at 5:30 a neighborhood meeting was conducted with 3 neighbors in attendance asking for photos and backup provided. Mr. Kreidermacher explained that the panels could not be placed on the North end of the property due to the distance to an Austin Utilities transformer. He stated they chose to do 4 shorter rows rather than 4 long rows to make the panels less noticeable to neighbors.

Commissioner Lutz asked Mr. Kreidermacher for the maximum height of the panels. Paul stated it would be 9-10 feet.

Commissioner Lutz asked the height of the Drees’ fence. Mr. Drees stated the fence is 4 feet tall.

Commissioner Postma opened up the conversation to neighboring property owners who were present.

Krista Hawley at 3711 5th Ave NW expressed opposition and asked why the North section of property was not considered for the solar panels. Mr. Kreidermacher explained it was due to the transformer being 500-600ft away.

Commissioner Postma stated he did drive out to the location to look and that his main concern is that the size of the panels is over what the property owner would use, not as much the aesthetics of the solar panels. The petitioner, Arlo Drees, stated they chose the location because to the West the trees are too tall. Behind the house the terrain was not feasible and to the North was the electrical issue with the transformers. He stated he offered to add shrubs along the fence and to move the panels back after the neighbors expressed their concerns.

Commissioner Postma asked if lowering the number of panels was considered. Mr. Drees stated that doing so would bring a later return on investment. Mr. Kreidermacher also stated that the USDA grant that was applied for is partial to larger systems.

Commissioner Stewart stated his concerns were with Commissioner Postma in the size of the panels being over what the property needs verses the aesthetics the neighbors are expressing concern over. He asked for the numbers of square footage that the Drees property would be over on accessory structures.

Ms. Wallace stated that in an R-1 district, properties over 1 acre are allowed 1,584 sq ft in accessory structures. The Drees currently have 3800 sq ft in accessory structures due to being annexed into the city with these structures already in place. They are requesting another 2,500 sq ft making the total 6,305 (over by approximately 4,700 sq ft).

Commissioner Lutz stated he also went to view the property and the aesthetic concern would only change the view the neighbors have of Mr. Drees' house directly, and that it wouldn't go above his windows. He also stated that any concerns of views are over 300 ft away from Mr. Drees' property.

Commissioner Postma stated he also noticed that most neighbors have trees in their front yard that would block the view of Drees' house somewhat.

Commissioner Lutz motioned to recommend that council approve the variance as requested. Commissioner Postma seconded. Roll call below. Motion carried.

Stewart – Nay
Salas Ramirez – Aye
Swenson – Aye
Lutz – Aye
Postma – Aye

Ayes – 4 Nays - 1

Commissioner Lutz motioned to adjourn. Seconded by Commissioner Postma. All in favor, none opposed. Roll call below.

Postma – Aye

Lutz – Aye

Stewart – Aye

Salas Ramirez – Aye

Swenson – Aye

Ayes – 5 Nays - 0

Meeting adjourned at 6:35 pm.