

MINUTES OF THE SOLANO COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

Meeting of December 3, 2015

The regular meeting of the Solano County Planning Commission was held in the Solano County Administration Center, Board of Supervisors' Chambers (1st floor), 675 Texas Street, Fairfield, California.

PRESENT: Commissioners Cayler, Walker, Hollingsworth, Castellblanch, and Chairperson Rhoads-Poston

EXCUSED: None

STAFF PRESENT: Mike Yankovich, Planning Program Manager; Jim Laughlin, Deputy County Counsel; and Kristine Letterman, Planning Commission Clerk

Chairperson Rhoads-Poston called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. with a salute to the flag. Roll call was taken and a quorum was present.

Approval of the Agenda

The Agenda was approved with no additions or deletions.

Item Nos. 1, 2 & 3

The minutes of the regular meetings of September 17, November 5, and November 19, 2015 were approved as prepared.

Items from the Public:

There was no one from the public wishing to speak.

Regular Calendar

Item 4.

PUBLIC HEARING to consider Minor Revision No. 2 to Use Permit No. U-90-29 and Marsh Development Permit No. MD-90-05 of **Solano Land Trust** to allow habitat restoration, facility improvements and site utilization for Rush Ranch located at 3521 Grizzly Island Road, Suisun City, in an "A-SM-160" Suisun Marsh Agricultural and "MP" Marsh Protection Zoning District, APN's: 0046-140-040, 050, 060, 070; 0046-150-010, 030; 0046-160-080. The Planning Commission will also be considering adoption of a Mitigated Negative Declaration of Environmental Impact as recommended by the Solano County Department of Resource Management. (Project Planner: Nedzlene Ferrario)

This item was continued to the regular meeting of January 21, 2016. Mr. Yankovich noted that the Negative Declaration of Environmental Impact prepared for this project was being recirculated for public review. The document includes additional biological content.

Item 5.

PUBLIC HEARING to consider Use Permit Application No. U-15-04 of **SolAgra Corporation** to operate an agricultural research facility regarding the feasibility of growing crops beneath solar arrays in the “A-80” Exclusive Agricultural Zoning District. The project is located on Ryer Island at 4338 State Highway 84, APN: 0042-240-120 The Planning Commission will also be considering adoption of a Negative Declaration of Environmental Impact as recommended by the Solano County Department of Resource Management. (Project Planner: Nedzlene Ferrario)

Nedzlene Ferrario gave the commission a brief overview of the staff report. The property is located at the south side of Highway 220, approximately 350 feet east of Highway 84, on Ryer Island. On the west end of the property is a pear orchard. The project site is flat, without trees and bare. Elkhorn Slough is located 1.27 miles east of the subject parcel. Marshes, wetlands, vernal pools or riparian vegetation do not exist on the project site. SolAgra proposes to conduct agricultural research regarding the feasibility and economic viability of growing crops under solar arrays on Ryer Island. The electrical power production will be utilized on adjacent property by Reclamation District 501. A Negative Declaration was prepared for the project and circulated. Public comment period closed November 24, 2015. No potentially significant adverse environmental impacts were identified. Staff recommended approval of the project.

The applicant, Barry Sgarella, provided a detailed presentation explaining the method that would be used for farming and which crops would be grown such as hops and alfalfa. He described the dimensions and specifications of the panels and equipment as well as the daily process. He spoke to the test project that was grown at U.C. Davis and its success.

Chairperson Rhoads-Poston opened the public hearing.

Russ Lester, spoke on behalf of the Ag Advisory Committee. He commented that the committee has worked with SolAgra for a number of years on the solar ordinance that was recently adopted by the county, and he voiced his appreciation for the support SolAgra provided in that process. He noted that the Board of Supervisors gave direction that they did not want ag land converted into solar or ag production lost, and so that was a goal to achieve in the ordinance, as well as including the possibility of research. Mr. Lester stated that the committee supports staff’s recommendation for approval of the project. He said that while they support this they know it will take time to determine whether it will meet the goals set. He said they strongly support the condition with regard to the requirement of a bond in the event the project does not perform so that the land is returned back to ag production and to its original condition. Mr. Lester said the committee would be interested in being involved with this project as it moves forward to monitor the viability of the program.

Since there were no further speakers, Chairperson Rhoads-Poston closed the public hearing.

Commissioner Hollingsworth commented that recently the county went through the

process of updating the Travis Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan. He noted that Colonel Gary Gottschall from Travis AFB was in the audience this evening. Mr. Hollingsworth asked if Colonel Gottschall could provide Travis' view on the project.

Colonel Gottschall, Deputy Director of Operations at the 60th Operations Group, stated that his group is involved in running the flying operations at Travis to assess these types of matters. Col. Gottschall stated that Mr. Sgarella engaged with the Base when this project was still in the concept stage to try to design in mitigation to flying operations. Col. Gottschall commented that the concern with solar is with glint and glare and he noted that there is a universal standard tool the Federal Aviation Administration uses for assessing these types of projects. He said that they introduced that tool to Mr. Sgarella as a part of the process to make sure that this was not going to be a blinding mirror flashing into the traffic control tower and aircraft maneuvering to land. He noted that they performed this test for both Travis AFB and the Rio Vista Airport. Col. Gottschall announced that they ran the tool with Mr. Sgarella early on and found no problems and also independently ran it again with the latest data provided by SolAgra and at this point they have no concerns about the project in terms of adverse impact on their flying operations.

Commissioner Walker stated that he attended the ag committee meetings and found them fascinating and he learned a lot. He said he is excited to see where we are especially given the ordinance the Board recently adopted and with Travis AFB being on board and knowing that ag land is being protected. He stated that he supported staff's recommendation for approval.

Commissioner Cayler stated that she appreciated Mr. Lester's involvement and hard work with the committee on this issue.

A motion was made by Commissioner Cayler and seconded by Commissioner Hollingsworth to determine that the Negative Declaration pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act is adequate and complete and approve an agricultural research facility to conduct research regarding the feasibility of growing crops beneath solar arrays in the A-80 zoning district. The motion passed unanimously. (Resolution No. 4633)

ANNOUNCEMENTS and REPORTS

There were no announcements or reports.

Since there was no further business, the meeting was **adjourned**.