

MERCED COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION
MINUTES FOR MEETING OF JANUARY 14, 2015

The agenda, original minutes, video, and all supporting documentation (for reference purposes only) of the Merced County Planning Commission meeting of January 14, 2015 are available online at www.co.merced.ca.us/planning/plancomarchive.html.

I. CALL MEETING TO ORDER

The regularly scheduled meeting of the Merced County Planning Commission was called to order at 9:00 a.m., on January 14, 2015 in the Board Chambers located at 2222 "M" Street, Third Floor, Merced, California.

II. ROLL CALL OF COMMISSIONERS

Commissioners Present: Commissioner Jack Mobley – Acting Chairman
 Commissioner Mark Erreca
 Commissioner Rich Ford
 Commissioner Greg Thompson

Staff Present: Mark Hendrickson, Director
 Oksana Newmen, Deputy Director-Planning
 Ana Muniz-Laguna, Recording Secretary

Legal Staff: Trevor Finneman, County Counsel

Commissioners Absent: None

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

None

IV. CITIZEN COMMUNICATIONS

None

V. PUBLIC HEARINGS

Mr. Mark Hendrickson thanked and introduced Mr. Robert Acheson as a new member of the Planning Commission appointed by the County Board of Supervisors. He also informed to the Commission and to the public that the item on the agenda will be opened for discussion today, but will be continued to the following Planning Commission meeting for a motion.

- A. CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT No. CUP12-017 - WRIGHT SOLAR PARK LLC -**
To construct a 200 Megawatt solar photovoltaic energy facility containing solar panels, battery storage, power inverters, and voltage transformers on approximately 2731 acres of land. The project site is designated Foothill Pasture, zoned A-2 (Exclusive Agricultural), and located southwest of the intersection of I-5 and SR 33/152 and south of Billy Wright Road in the Los Baños area. **ON**

Recommendations: The actions requested are to:

- 1) Consider formulating a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors addressing possible adoption of the Project Environmental Impact Report, including a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program, prepared in accordance with CEQA Guidelines; and;

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- 2) Consider formulating a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors that addresses possible approval of Conditional Use Permit Application No. CUP12-017, including cancellation of Williamson Act Contracts, based upon the project findings and subject to the recommended conditions of approval provided in the Staff Report.

Oksana Newmen, Deputy Director, gave a PowerPoint presentation and summarized the Staff Report. She reiterated that the information presented was for the Commission's review and no motion was being requested today. Ms. Newmen also pointed out that a comment letter from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and was received and was provided to the Commission for review. She stated that staff and environmental consultants are available to answer any questions.

Speaking on behalf of the project was Mr. Al Solis from Sol Development Associates, LLC and informed that this firm represents and consults with six different solar companies including Frontier Renewables, which is part of Wright Solar. Mr. Solis explained other central valley projects that Frontier Renewables is involved with. He explained that the letter from the Department of Conservation included in the review packet is a valuable letter of support for the project. He further pointed out that the Solar Benefits Agreement included with this project was a plus for the economic well being of the Merced County.

Mr. Baldwin Hesse, CEO/President of Frontier Renewables and Rhinehart Hesse, Chief Developer both addressed the Commission and gave an overview of their company and explained how and why they decided on this project and its location.

Mr. Troy Rahmig from ICF International, Wildlife Biologist, explained that he is there to answer questions and support the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) Process and spoke of the extended contact with both the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Department of Conservation throughout the process of this project to comply with any mitigation requirements.

Commissioner Thompson asked if the federal and state permits are being sought parallel to each other and Mr. Rahmig answered that all necessary federal and state permits they are being obtained in tandem with the other so that they are in sync and not separate.

Commissioner Mobley inquired if the panels can be replaced with time to increase the efficiency of the panels as time progresses. Mr. Baldwin Hesse informed that the way these panels are designed, they are fixed for the life expectancy, usually 35 years, unless a panel is malfunctioning, it will remain there for that duration. Mr. Hesse also stated that this helps in the overall cost of solar power competitiveness as well.

Commissioner Ford asked how the property and sales tax values were calculated, and where the panels were coming from. Mr. Hesse stated that the numbers presented were calculated over the life of the project and that every effort would be made to source the panels locally and hire locally as well.

The public hearing opened at 9:25 a.m.

Mr. Dominic Arotzarena, owner of the property, spoke to the Commission and stated that although the land has been in his family for generations, he has not been successful at farming on it due to many factors including irrigation issues. He stated he supports this project as it will do something productive with this land and for the local community.

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Mr. Mark Bouden, representative of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Local 684, addressed the Commission and stated that Merced County is one of the four counties that is served by this union. He stated that he is in support of Frontier Renewables and this project. He stated that one of the main reasons for their support to this projects is new jobs for this community. Mr. Bouden stated that many of the men and women of the county will benefit from this project.

The public hearing closed at 9:55 a.m.

Mr. Mark Hendrickson requested a 10 minute recess which was granted by Chairman Mobley.

After the recess, Mr. Hendrickson gave two date options for a continuation meeting regarding this item and the dates proposed were January 21st 2015 for a special meeting, or February 11th, 2015 for a regular scheduled meeting.

MOTION: M/S ERRECA-FORD, AND CARRIED BY A VOTE OF 4-0, THE PLANNING COMMISSION FINDS TO CONTINUE CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT No. CUP12-017 - RIGHT SOLAR PARK LLC , UNTIL 9:00 AM ON JANUARY, 21, 2015.

VI. COMMISSION ACTION ITEM (S)

None

VII. DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Mr. Hendrickson thanked Mr. Robert Acheson for sitting through the meeting and welcomed him to the Commission.

VIII. COMMISSIONERS COMMENTS

None

IX. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 10:05 a.m.