

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION OF CARIBOU COUNTY, IDAHO HELD THURSDAY, DECEMBER 3RD, 2020.

ROLL CALL SHOWED THE FOLLOWING PRESENT: Glayd Christensen
Nolan Koller
Wendy Pelayo – Acting Chairwoman
JoAnna Ashley, P&Z Administrator

ABSENT: Reagan Phillips – Chairman, Scott Hayden – Vice Chairman

ALSO PRESENT:

6:00 PM Wendy Pelayo, acting Chairwoman, opened the meeting. Glayd Christensen moved to approve the November 5th, 2020 minutes as drafted, seconded by Nolan Koller. All in favor, minutes approved.

Chairwoman Pelayo turned the time over to Bryce Griffiths who said that he was presenting this evening as a citizen of Caribou County (not a representative of the Natural Resource Conservation District, where he is employed). He said he had heard about a potential solar farm coming to the County and in general he would like the County to consider some things in regards to solar farms. In his handouts he included a copy of various examples where he felt solar farms were effective in an agricultural setting and felt like these types of uses of solar power should be allowed in the Agricultural Zone. He went onto mention he didn't feel that a 2,800-acre solar farm covering some of our best farm land was a best use. P&Z Admin Ashley pointed out that the Commission could not discuss this potential application per the guidance of County Attorney Doug Wood. Mr. Griffiths said he wished to discuss some of the verbiage in the zoning code for the Agricultural Zone in Chapter 3 of the Zoning Code. He felt the purpose was well written but wanted to address concerns in other areas. In Chapter 3.02 it states "applied to land which includes prime farmland". He said the County needs to be careful as the definition of "Prime Farmland" is per the definition of the United States Federal Government, "Soil south of Idaho County must be irrigated to be considered Prime Farmland." He provided a handout that provided an outline for criteria for land to be defined as Prime Farmland. He reviewed the hand out with Commission and pointed out how a significant portion of the land in Caribou County does not meet these requirements, simply because they don't have irrigated land. He recommended the County create its own definition of "Prime Farmland" or, contact the State Soil Scientist with the NRCS and see if the portion regarding irrigated land could be omitted as part of the definition of "Prime Farmland." Or the County could look at writing its own definition.

Under permitted uses listed in Chapter 3.03.01.H he raised concerned that "Public Utility Installation" was opened end and could be interpreted to allowed a Solar Farm. Someone could misconstrue "public benefit" under the definition as a solar farm that would provide power to say LA County. He asked what "Public Service Facility" was under 3.03.01.L P&Z Admin directed him to the definition in the code which addressed his concern. P&Z Admin Ashley stated the County was currently drafting an ordinance to specifically address solar farms, like the County currently has a Wind Energy ordinance. This, once adopted, would address the issues surrounding solar farms in the County.

The Commission asked if Mr. Griffiths would be willing to attend as the NRCS Scientist for Caribou County to address the definition of "Prime Farmland." Mr. Griffiths said he could and it was arranged for him to attend the next meeting.

The Commission discussed the creation of the solar ordinance to govern the use of solar from personal to commercial. P&Z Admin explained that there some state agencies who deal with solar farms in Idaho. The answer was they don't get involved until the solar farm creation or transmission will have to take place on

State or Federal land. She explained she had been in contact with several agencies such as the Governor's Office of Energy and Mineral Resources (EMR), Idaho Public Utilities Commission, the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (IDEQ); the finding of this was that solar is still fairly new in Idaho and the County should consider seriously the implications, including what decommissioning a farm would cost and how that would be addressed. She explained she has procured a couple ordinances to address solar farms.

P&Z Admin Ashley explained to the Commission that there is a state-wide effort to begin addressing the preservation of Agricultural farmland in Idaho. In addition, the Commissioners have approved the creation of a County Agricultural Committee, made up of members of the community involved in Agriculture. Currently there is survey that will be sent out, and then as this moves forward there would be community meetings (possibly held over Zoom) to hold dialogue, address questions and concerns and build a better of how to help Caribou County grow. It would also be a way to share information with the public regarding current data, statistics and resources to help protect the County's agricultural land while promoting growth.

6:15 PM Nolan Koller moved to adjourn, seconded by Glayd Christensen. Meeting adjourned.