

**City of Gardner, Massachusetts
City Council Public Welfare Committee
Minutes of the Meeting of April 11, 2018**

Councillor Christine Johnson called the Public Welfare Committee meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. on Wednesday, April 11, 2018 in the City Council Chamber. Committee members Councillors Nathan Boudreau and Elizabeth Kazinskas were present. Assistant City Clerk Titi Siriphan was also present.

Other officials present and/or participating were Council President Scott Graves; Councillor James Johnson; Bill Hannigan, President, Hannigan Engineering; and Andrew Mansfield of *The Gardner News*.

Minutes of Prior Meeting(s).

On a motion by Councillor Christine Johnson and seconded by Councillor Nathan Boudreau, it was voted to accept the Minutes of the March 15, 2018 Public Welfare Committee Meeting, as printed.

#9898 – A Petition by Zero Point Development, Inc. to Amend the Code of the City of Gardner, Chapter 675 Thereof, Entitled “Zoning” by Adding a Solar Photovoltaic Overlay District off Lovewell Street.

Councillor Christine Johnson stated that it is a good idea to meet today following the public hearing and Planning Board meeting, adding that the Committee may determine whether there is enough information in order to make a recommendation to the full Council.

Councillor Boudreau stated that Tuesday’s Public Hearing was long but an educational presentation.

Councillor Kazinskas stated that it was a great presentation and a lot of good questions were answered.

Councillor Christine Johnson stated that she would like to enter into the record the documents that a constituent provided regarding electromagnetic fields and how they cause cancer and can be harmful to the environment.

Bill Hannigan stated he does not claim to be an expert in electromagnetic fields but noted that the documentation presented is inconsistent with what he has read in the past relating to electromagnetic fields. He noted the following:

- The documents provided to the Committee relate more to power lines and high-tension wires.
- The areas where the electromagnetic fields would be prevalent are in a location where the inverter pads would be sited. The solar panels take in energy and transmitted via DC power, passes through inverters, converts to AC power, and sent to the grid for connection.

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- The room they are standing in has electromagnetic ambient energy, but if you were to stand next to an inverter, you would get a higher reading.
- There are people who do have sensitivity to electromagnetic fields.
- The location of the inverters should be fine as long as they aren't placed near a house.

Councillor Christine Johnson questioned maintenance of the units, saying that she read articles that say solar panels start to deteriorate after 3 years.

Mr. Hannigan replied that these panels are designed to last for 20 years. He noted:

- Technology changes rapidly. Every time technology changes, they are able to improve and reduce the carbon footprint.
- Maybe around 15 years, they may swap out some of the panels because the efficiency of the panels will improve.
- Panels are low maintenance. They will be connected by a monitoring system that they review remotely, so if one of the panels go down, they will know which panel it is and send a crew to repair/replace.
- If a panel drops efficiency, they would repair/replace that panel.
- They may go out to clear the roads in the winter so they have access to the panels.
- Summer months, they would mow the area to keep grass from burning out. A special grass or wild flowers will be grown near the area because they grow a certain height and stop.

Councillor Christine Johnson questioned ground contamination around the transformer and the panels requiring water to cool.

Mr. Hannigan said that they don't need water to cool. The older panels that were thick, and did require water to cool, but the ones they would be using are very thin and are "air cooled" on their own.

In regards to contamination around the transformers, the transformers today have no PCB in them.

- He hasn't heard of any contamination issues with modern day transformers.
- The transformers would be supplied by National Grid and that they have no control over what the manufacturer puts in them.
- Haven't heard of any modern-day transformer contamination.
- National Grid has been slowly phasing out PCB in the late '70s or '80s. There wouldn't be any PCB transformers on this property.

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Council President Graves stated that he has been following up with Trevor Beauregard regarding any and all documentation regarding health risks associated with this project. The Board of Health and Conservation Commission will be involved with this process, he added.

Councillor Boudreau stated that he supports entrepreneurs and this particular project. The Dubzinskis, he said, took their own money, bought a piece of land and, if they aren't hurting the land and not truly disrupting the neighbors, then they should be allowed to do as they wish. The Council shouldn't tell them what to do with their land. He added that he would like to hear from CD&P Director Trevor Beauregard whether there are any potential health hazards, and if so, then he would vote against the zoning change.

Mr. Hannigan stated that it's not just the land owners and developers making all the decisions. Once the process gets past this step, everything gets reviewed through Planning Board, Conservation, and also requires Federal EPA permits for the construction phase. There will be a lot of eyes looking through this project, he added.

A constituent in the audience, Alisha Griffin, addressed concerns about having solar panels of this magnitude of size in a residential area. She said that she believes it is a health hazard; there aren't enough studies; and, worries that if a fire breaks out, it would create toxic fumes.

Mr. Hannigan responded, saying that there isn't enough evidence to show that the panels cause harm. Transformers can blow anytime, anyplace in the city, and dealt with by the appropriate personnel, he said. With respect to the ingredients inside the solar panels, he said that "if you eat them, yes, you would get sick, but they are sealed within the panels." He cited a panel in the Town of Spencer that did catch fire, which his firm wasn't involved with. The Fire Department went to the site and allowed it to burn and the damaged panel was replaced. The ability for the toxins to get beyond the site is extremely limited because the controls are placed by the fire department and the developer. If there is a problem with a panel, it is contained, removed and replaced, he added.

Councillor Kazinskas said that as a Committee member, it is her responsibility to make a recommendation and that she has done her own research. She said that she didn't find any health issues beyond what has already been mentioned. "This one thing that can be done on 127 acres of land and there other also things that can be done," adding that the project is a good sustainable way to utilize the land. She said that it is private property and supports the proposal.

Councillor Christine Johnson stated that she supports "green energy," but is concerned because the proposed overlay district is in a residentially-zoned area. She also stated that she disagrees with clear-cutting several acres of trees for a solar array, as well as the proposed location on

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the land. If it were up to her, she said, she would ban all residential solar and have them sited in only in industrial, commercial and agricultural areas.

On a motion made by Councillor Nathan Boudreau and seconded by Councillor Elizabeth Kazinskas, it was voted to recommend to the City Council that the Ordinance amendment be adopted. Councillor Christine Johnson voted against the motion.

Adjournment.

On a motion Councillor Christine Johnson and seconded by Councillor Nathan Boudreau, it was voted to adjourn at 7:36 p.m.