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CITY OF NORTHFIELD, MN  
CITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 2021-  
APPROVING A CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT FOR A 1MW COMMUNITY SOLAR  
GARDEN IN THE A-S DISTRICT

WHEREAS, the applicant, MN CSG 2019-77 LLC, seeks a Conditional Use Permit to allow a 1MW community solar garden on about eight acres of land, known as PID 43-02700-50-030 and legally described as the Southwest ¼ of the Southwest ¼ of Section 27, Township 112, Range 20, except for the West 562.3 feet of the East 932.3 feet of the South 620 feet thereof, Dakota County, Minnesota, which is zoned A-S Agricultural; and,

WHEREAS, all required notices regarding the public hearing were properly made; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission conducted a public hearing on April 15, 2021, and received public testimony regarding the proposed Conditional Use Permit; and,

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission found that the application meets the standards in the Land Development Code for conditional use; and,

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission has reviewed and recommended approval of the Conditional Use Permit; and,

WHEREAS, the City Council reviewed the requested Conditional Use Permit and Planning Commission recommendation and conditions for the requested Conditional Use Permit at its meeting of \_\_\_\_\_, 2021.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL THAT:

1. The Planning Commission's findings from its April 15, 2021, meeting, which are attached hereto and incorporated herein by reference as Exhibit A, are hereby adopted.

2. The Conditional Use Permit to allow a 1MW community solar garden in the A-S district is approved, subject to the following conditions:
- a. The applicant shall coordinate with adjacent CSG applicants to create as few shared access points to the project areas as possible, thereby ensuring proper access by the applicant, the applicant's employees, emergency personnel and minimizing adverse traffic effects on Highway 19.
  - b. The applicant shall provide adequate off-street parking and staging to not impede traffic along adjacent roadway systems.
  - c. New power lines installed to serve the site shall be underground other than the main feeder onto the property to the greatest extent possible and in conjunction with electric utility approval.
  - d. Fencing shall be of a design capable of allowing small animals access in and out of the fenced CSG.
  - e. An interior setback of 50 feet shall be met.
  - f. The project must incorporate a 50-foot wildlife corridor on the west side of the CSG and mid-way towards the south of the CSG to provide an east/west access for wildlife away from Highway 19.
  - g. Native bushes and trees shall be planted along the exterior and interior of the site (outside the fenced CSG).
  - h. A cover crop inside the footprint of the CSG and wildlife corridors will be planted with a combination of low growth native crops and a seed mix that promotes pollinator friendly habitats.
  - i. On-site storm water management shall not be provided at a single basin, but rather long and linear to mimic runoff that currently exists and doesn't have a concentrated discharge point.
  - j. This project is subject to other City approvals pursuant to City Code, including but not limited to site plan, grading and stormwater management approval, which could result in additional required project modifications.

PASSED by the City Council of the City of Northfield on this \_\_\_\_th day of \_\_\_\_ 2021.

ATTEST

\_\_\_\_\_  
City Clerk

\_\_\_\_\_  
Mayor

VOTE:        \_\_\_\_ POWNELL        \_\_\_\_ GRABAU        \_\_\_\_ NAKASIAN        \_\_\_\_ NESS  
              \_\_\_\_ PETERSON WHITE        \_\_\_\_ REISTER        \_\_\_\_ ZUCCOLOTTO

**Exhibit A**  
**Planning Commission Findings**

The site is currently located in the A-S Agricultural zoning district. The proposed project is allowed as a Conditional Use according to Table 2.7-1: Permitted Principal Uses. A CUP follows the Type 4 Review Procedure found in Section 8.5.9 of the LDC. When reviewing a CUP, the Planning Commission is to consider the following criteria:

**a) The proposed use is allowed as a conditional use in the district for which it is proposed.**

A Community Solar Garden is allowed as a conditional use in the A-S zone district according to Table 2.7-1 of the LDC.

**b) The conditional use will be in accordance with the general objectives, or with any specific objective, of the city's comprehensive plan and this LDC.**

The conditional use is in compliance with the Comprehensive Plan. Map 4.3 Conservation and Development designates the project area for managed growth, which are areas that are supportive of mixed-use development. The Comprehensive Plan context zone designation for this site is "District" and "Areas potentially not meeting sanitary sewer and water level of service". "District" is defined as a special use area composed of large business or industrial structures. The Comprehensive Plan states that no change in character is anticipated in "District" areas with respect to future development.

In the Policy and Planning section of the Northfield Climate Action Plan, a portion is dedicated to Renewable Energy. Policy and Planning (PP) 3.2 identifies the need to "Establish an in-boundary goal to generate the equivalent of 10% of the City's electricity from rooftop and ground-mount solar installations by 2030".

In the Comprehensive Plan, Environmental Resources Strategy 10 indicates the City will remain responsive to issues of climate change and will act to reduce Northfield's contribution to climate change. Specifically, ER 10.3 is to "promote the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions at residential, industrial and commercial scales".

The proposal meets the Site Development Standards for the Agricultural Zone District as defined in Article 3 of the LDC and the Use Specific Standards found in Article 2 and is subject to final site plan review by city staff.

**c) The conditional use will be designed, constructed, operated, and maintained so as to be harmonious and appropriate in appearance with the existing or intended character of the general vicinity and that such use will not change the essential character of the same area.**

The MN CSG 2019-77 LLC project is appropriate with the general vicinity with the addition of conditions. Several conditions of approval are recommended to ensure the project compliances with policies, and to mitigate potential adverse impacts so the project will be harmonious with the surrounding area.

Staff is recommending:

1. New power lines installed to serve the site shall be underground other than the main feeder onto the property to the greatest extent possible and in conjunction with electric utility approval.
2. Fencing shall be of a design capable of allowing small animals access in and out of the fenced CSG.
3. An interior setback of 50 feet shall be met.
4. The project must incorporate a 50-foot wildlife corridor on the west side of the CSG and mid-way towards the south of the CSG to provide an east/west access for wildlife away from Highway 19.
5. Native bushes and trees shall be planted along the exterior and interior of the site (outside the fenced CSG).
6. A cover crop inside the footprint of the CSG and wildlife corridors will be planted and maintained with a combination of low growth native crops and a seed mix that promotes pollinator friendly habitats.

**d) The conditional use will not be hazardous or reasonably disturbing to existing or future uses.**

The project is not anticipated to be hazardous or reasonably disturbing to existing or future uses with the addition of the conditions recommended by staff:

1. New power lines installed to serve the site shall be underground other than the main feeder onto the property to the greatest extent possible and in conjunction with electric utility approval.
2. Fencing shall be of a design capable of allowing small animals access in and out of the fenced CSG.
3. An interior setback of 50 feet shall be met.
4. The project must incorporate a 50-foot wildlife corridor on the west side of the CSG and mid-way towards the south of the CSG to provide an east/west access for wildlife away from Highway 19.
5. Native bushes and trees shall be planted along the exterior and interior of the site (outside the fenced CSG).
6. A cover crop inside the footprint of the CSG and wildlife corridors will be planted and maintained with a combination of low growth native crops and a seed mix that promotes pollinator friendly habitats.
7. This project is subject to other City approvals pursuant to City Code, including but not limited to site plan, grading and stormwater management approval, which could result in additional required project modifications.

These additional conditions support a future natural greenway corridor as depicted on the Northfield Planned Walking and Bicycling Network of the City of Northfield Pedestrian, Bike, and Trail System report from April 2019 completed by Toole Design. The conversion of agricultural land use to a native grass/pollinator friendly mix will provide better habitat for pollinators and grassland birds native to the area.

A change to another land use can occur after the Project is removed at the end of the Project's useful life. The Project is not anticipated to preclude current or planned land use on any adjacent parcel.

A National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit application to discharge stormwater from construction will be acquired from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. Best Management Practices will be used during construction and operation of the Project to protect topsoil and adjacent resources and to minimize soil erosion, whether the erosion is caused by water or wind. A Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan will be developed for the project and approved by the Public Works department prior to construction.

This project utilizes silicon-based solar panels, which have an anti-glare coating. There are no moving parts nor hazardous materials in the system, and no noise other than typical transformer humming would be present onsite. The system will be enclosed within an 8-foot tall agricultural/deer fence (providing access for small animals to access in and out of the CSG) to minimize the visual impact and restrict access to the system from unqualified personnel as well as prevent larger animals from jumping the fence.

- e) **The conditional use will be served adequately by essential public facilities and services such as streets, police and fire protection, drainage structures, refuse disposal, water and sewer.**

The property is served by nearby electric/power utilities adequate for the proposed use. Limited essential public services (police and fire protection) will be necessary for construction and operation of the Project. The applicant shall coordinate with adjacent CSG applicants to create as few shared access points to the project areas as possible, thereby ensuring proper access by the applicant, the applicant's employees, emergency personnel and minimizing adverse traffic effects on Highway 19.

- f) **The benefits of the conditional use outweigh the potential negative effects of the surrounding community.**

The CSG, if approved subject to the recommended conditions, should mitigate and outweigh the potential negative effects of the surrounding community. The City's Strategic Plan emphasizes climate action as a priority and CGS accelerate options for local, clean power. Through community solar, individuals, businesses and municipalities can choose solar as their energy resource, an option that has not existed until now and benefit from the low cost, improved infrastructure and local economic development.

- g) **The conditional use will not create excessive additional requirements at public cost for public facilities and services.**

No additional public costs for public facilities and services are anticipated at this time. Limited essential public services (police and fire protection) will be necessary for construction and operation of the Project.

- h) The conditional use will not involve uses, activities, processes, materials, equipment and conditions or operations that will be detrimental to any persons, property or the general welfare by reason of excessive traffic, noise, smoke, fumes, glare, or odors.**

The construction period is planned for 3 months beginning in May of 2021. During construction, noise will be emitted by the construction vehicles and equipment. The amount of noise will vary based on what type of construction is occurring on a given day. These noise impacts will be temporary. The applicant has stated during the beginning construction phase, efforts are coordinated to have most materials arrive within the first couple of weeks of the Project starting. Temporary impacts are anticipated on some public roads within the vicinity of the Project, primarily through additional traffic and slow-moving construction vehicles. A condition to provide adequate off-street parking and staging to not impede traffic along adjacent roadway systems will be implemented. To limit reflection, solar PV panels are constructed of dark, light-absorbing materials and covered with an anti-reflective coating. Today's panels reflect as little as two percent of the incoming sunlight depending on the angle of the sun.

- i) The conditional use will not result in the destruction, loss, or damage of natural, scenic, or historic features of major importance as may be established in the comprehensive plan or other city plans related to natural, scenic, or historic features**

This CSG is adjacent to a property identified to have an Oak Forest mesic subtype labeled as Good condition in the Natural Resources Inventory. The 50-foot interior setback along with the wildlife corridors and landscaping helps prevent any loss to the forest and establishes off-street trails and corridors for the Northfield Planned Walking and Bicycling Network of the City of Northfield Pedestrian, Bike, and Trail System plan.

- j) The traffic and parking generated by the use will not lower the Levels of Services as described in the comprehensive plan update of intersections within a quarter mile of the site.**

Once constructed, traffic to the site will be limited to periodic inspection and maintenance. There will be little or no impact on the level of service for intersections within a quarter mile of the site. Temporary construction traffic will include pickup trucks, semi-trailers for delivery of equipment, and other machinery. It is unexpected to use any overweight or oversized loads during the construction.

- k) In residential districts – Not applicable to this site.**

- l) In the Perimeter Transition Area (PTA) – Not applicable to this site.**

- m) Impacts such as noise, hours of activity, and outdoor lighting have been addressed to mitigate negative impacts on nearby uses.**

During construction, noise will be emitted by the construction vehicles and equipment. The amount of noise will vary based on what type of construction is occurring on a given day. These noise impacts will be temporary. The applicant has stated during the beginning construction phase, efforts are coordinated to have most materials arrive within the first couple of weeks of the Project starting. Hours of activity will follow the noise and nuisance ordinances in the City Code. The site will not be permanently lit nor have regular operation hours.

- n) Parking is adequately provided for the proposed conditional use, but an excessive number of parking spaces are not proposed.**

Construction and operation and maintenance crews will access to the site by a proposed fourteen (14) foot wide gravel road that has a twenty (20) foot entrance off 140 on the South part of the property. Road access will be controlled for erosion control during construction. Construction crew parking will be located entirely within the site. No additional permanent parking is required. Maintenance crews will park within the site access road and turnaround area.