

YAKIMA COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION
Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, February 12, 2025 at 5:30 PM

Location: Microsoft Teams Meeting

- I. **Call to Order:** Chair Doug Mayo called the meeting to order at 5:35 PM and requested the roll call.

- A. **Roll Call.** A quorum was present at roll call and other commissioners logged on throughout the meeting.

1. **Planning Commission Members Present:** Doug Mayo, Mike Shuttleworth, Holly Castle, Isidra Sanchez, Jerry Craig (6:02 PM), and Sergio Garcia (6:14 PM)
2. **Planning Commission Members Absent:** Raul Martinez (unexcused)
3. **Yakima County Planning Staff Present:** Tommy Carroll, Olivia Story, Aaron M. Cohen, and Phil Hoge
4. **Public Present:** Byron Gumz (Yakima Valley Conference of Governments), Bec Hamel, Bill Eddie (OneEnergy Renewables), Cameron Krebs (shepherd associated with OneEnergy Renewables)

- B. **Approval of January 8, 2025, minutes.** Holly moved to approve the minutes for the January 8, 2025 meeting, as presented, Mike seconded, & the motion was approved 4-0.

- II. **Public Comments.** None.

- III. **New Business.** None.

- IV. **Unfinished Business.**

- A. Approving Changes to the Rules and Procedures Discussed at the January 8, 2025 meeting.

1. Aaron presented the Rules and Procedures with the changes requested by the Planning Commission (PC) at the January 8, 2025, meeting. The changes include allowing electronic signatures on all documents, updating the meeting location and adding specific language for locations of hearings, and revising the attendance requirements.
 - i. The attendance portion in Section 11.3 now reads that if a Planning Commission commissioner incurs three consecutive unexcused absences the Planning Commission shall consider submitting a recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) for the removal of the commissioner. The PC originally requested that after three consecutive unexcused absences the PC commissioner be automatically removed,

1 however per RCW 36.70.110, only the relevant legislative body can
2 remove a PC commissioner after a public hearing is held. Staff altered the
3 PC's request based on this RCW.

4 ii. Doug inquired if there is a quorum issue approving the changes because
5 only three of the four PC commissioners currently present were at the
6 meeting when the Rules of Procedures amendment motion was passed.

7 a. Aaron indicated it was not an issue in this instance because the matter
8 is not the result of a public hearing. Section 9.6 of the Rules and
9 Procedures states that a PC commissioner cannot vote on an item
10 considered at a public hearing if they did not attend the hearing and
11 cannot testify on the record they have reviewed all recordings and
12 read the entire written record.

13
14 2. Doug opened the floor for a motion, Mike moved to approve the changes to
15 the Rules and Procedures as presented, Holly seconded, and the motion was
16 approved 4-0.

17
18 B. Update on LRN2023-00001 – Comprehensive Plan and Development Standards for
19 Moderate to Large-Scale Solar Facilities – Topic Addressed: Agrivoltaics.

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21 1. Tommy went over the status of the moderate to large-scale solar facility
22 ordinance and outlined that the next steps are for the PC to review agrivoltaics
23 development standards. A summary of Tommy's presentation is below:

24 i. The moratorium in accepting applications for moderate to large-scale
25 solar facilities has been extended for another six months. The BOCC has
26 asked the PC to review/establish development standards to permit
27 agrivoltaics;

28 ii. The PC has made an official recommendation to the BOCC to not allow
29 moderate to large-scale solar facilities in the Agriculture (AG) Zoning
30 District. The PC recommendation is still in effect. This recommendation is
31 based on a written letter from the Washington Department of Commerce
32 and verbal communication with Futurewise, both indicating that allowing
33 solar facilities in the AG Zoning District is a violation of the Growth
34 Management Act (GMA), for which, an ordinance allowing such would
35 be appealed;

36 iii. Futurewise has not committed to anything in writing. It has been discussed
37 among eastern Washington counties that Futurewise is staying silent on the
38 issue of solar farms violating the GMA because they are in support of green
39 energy. It is thought they may not appeal a solar ordinance, even though
40 they have appealed other ordinances permitting non-agricultural uses in
41 agriculturally designated lands;

42 iv. The Planning Division has begun to examine where solar can be sited in
43 the rural areas. Often a big issue raised by the solar industry is rural areas
44 are often not near existing transmission lines. This increases

- development/interconnection costs for the developments and often requires obtaining more easements from property owners. Additionally, the GMA requires local jurisdictions to ensure the character of rural areas are not altered due to new uses allowed in rural zoning districts;
- v. If we approve solar facilities in these areas and get appealed to the Growth Management Hearings Board (GMHB) we will lose, as the removal of agricultural land for pure solar does go against the GMA, thus, the huge crux of the matter;
 - vi. Questions for the PC to consider are how to balance siting solar against other uses, should there be a minimum property size requirement, should we consider pollinator species as agrivoltaics, can we consider a one-to-one swap, and how do we define agrivoltaics?;
 - vii. The BOCC has reached out to the state legislature in hopes they can provide further guidance on this issue; however, the status of that request is not known at this time; and,
 - viii. All of these items will be discussed again at the March meeting.
2. Two public comments were made after Tommy's presentation. The first comment was made by Bill Eddie of OneEnergy Renewables and is summarized as follows:
- i. Bill is a vice-president of OneEnergy Renewables, which is based out of Seattle. The company originally took the Goose Prairie solar facility through EFSEC, but is no longer associated with the project. The company is currently in talks with a property owner to the west of Sunnyside to establish a forty some-odd acre solar farm. The property in question is not currently irrigated and is being used for grazing. It would be a small-scale farm utilizing local distribution lines. The property is ideal as it is close to an existing substation. If a project requires more transmission lines, it often includes more interconnections leading to higher costs;
 - ii. It is important to define agrivoltaics. Ultimately, agrivoltaics is the combination of an agriculture use with a solar use (this is specific to OneEnergy Renewables);
 - iii. Bill showed slides depicting various OneEnergy Renewables projects around the country, mainly in Wisconsin and Minnesota. Bill highlighted how grazing is becoming an industry standard (dual use) and is something done on a national level to scale;
 - iv. Bill also highlighted that OneEnergy Renewables looks to incorporate grazing into their projects. Landscaping between the panels will always be a cost and leasing livestock from a local rancher is a more economical and beneficial way to achieve landscaping/weed control. Traditional landscaping also involves spot spraying to control weeds, which could not be good for the soil;
 - v. Agrivoltaics have other economic benefits to the local economy as it enables farmers to lease their land and for the developer to pay ranchers

- 1 for their livestock. Often times cover crops involve pollinator plants, which
2 are a big benefit to the agricultural elements in the area;
- 3 vi. The physical design of the solar panels to incorporate agrivoltaics has
4 been successfully completed across the country. This has been
5 accomplished for cover crops though as it is difficult to get a tractor
6 through low lying crops due to the design of the solar panels and tractors;
- 7 vii. There is some ground disturbance when installing solar panels. A dust
8 control plan is required. Depending on the type of soil some posts are
9 hydraulically pounded into the ground. The goal is to have as little ground
10 disturbance as possible; and,
- 11 viii. Tommy asked Bill if he and his company would be interested in meeting to
12 discuss the draft ordinance and to talk more about the engineering
13 aspects of designing solar arrays with agriculture. Bill indicated yes. This was
14 specifically in regard to some of the pictures Tommy has seen in the
15 literature, which look impractical with current technology. Bill concurred at
16 least for utility scale solar projects.

17 After Bill, Cameron Krebs, a shepherd working with OneEnergy Renewables, gave
18 his comments, which are summarized below:

- 19 i. Cameron is an advocate for agrivoltaics and is a five-generation Oregon
20 shepherd;
- 21 ii. It is important to define agrivoltaics broadly as it encompasses a vast array of
22 combinations of agriculture and energy uses. It is important that the code is
23 not highly specific because the technology in the field evolves rapidly and
24 specific design requirements could become outdated fast;
- 25 iii. He provides sheep to many solar facilities across Oregon and Washington and
26 agrivoltaics is a big way for him to gain different sources of income. Grazing
27 does not have to be limited to a single property owner or rancher. Many could
28 be involved depending on the needs and the scope of the project allowing
29 more than one property owner to benefit;
- 30 iv. Goose Prairie is actively seeking to expand into agrivoltaics, indicating a need
31 and desire for agrivoltaics in Yakima County;
- 32 v. What we are seeing is similar to when my grandfather experienced the change
33 from the chisel plow to the board plow. There is a shift of land-use not suitable
34 for agriculture to become such through agrivoltaics;
- 35 vi. Cameron stressed the importance of providing pollinator habitats that will
36 benefit so many orchards in Yakima County, which also provide habitats for
37 pollinator species the winter months. This extends to all plants that require
38 pollination;
- 39 vii. There is a National American Association of Solar Grazers that is also leading in
40 the field of agrivoltaics;

- 1 viii. Recently, near Boardman, Oregon, a 10,000 acre agrivoltaics facility was
2 approved, which is a big opportunity to restore habitat for nesting and game
3 birds;
4 ix. We have known since the Dust Bowl the importance of protecting our soil and
5 not letting it blow or wash away. Agrivoltaics is a way to ensure our soil does
6 not blow or wash away and that water stays in our watersheds;
7 x. Oregon State University's Extension program also provides good resources for
8 combining solar and grazing. The local Natural Resources Conservation Service
9 is also a good resource for documenting how many heads of livestock a
10 property can hold and ensure people do not abuse the agrivoltaics by only
11 using a few livestock for grazing. The requirement for the number of livestock
12 and other grazing aspects can be stated in the conditional use permits;
13 xi. Proper grazing also leads to better fire management. There was a fire that
14 swept through a solar farm and the panels did not exhume toxic chemicals.
15 The grazing helped to control the fire by removing carbon; and,
16 xii. Tommy asked Cameron if he would be open to talking further. Cameron
17 indicated if Yakima County wished to utilize his consulting services, we can
18 speak further about that afterward.

20 **V. Communications**

22 **A. Reports of subcommittees and study groups.** None.

23 **B. Status report of cases before the BOCC.**

- 24 1. Olivia went over the status of the ATO project. The next step is to hold a work
25 session with the BOCC based on the final comments submitted into the
26 record. The hearing also needs to be closed. After this, the goal is to move
27 forward with an ordinance as soon as possible. Tommy indicated many
28 counties are waiting to see what happens with our ordinance until they move
29 forward with theirs.

30 **C. Secretary's Report.** None.

32 **VI. Adjournment or continuance to a date, time, and place.**

- 33 1. Mike moved to adjourn, Sergio seconded, and the motion was approved
34 without objection. The meeting adjourned at 6:48 PM.

36 Minutes approved by the Planning Commission on _____.

38 Signed: _____
39 Planning Commission, Chair