

**REGULAR MEETING
OF THE
VADNAIS HEIGHTS PLANNING COMMISSION
AUGUST 22, 2023**

OPEN MEETING AND WELCOME

Chairperson Cooper called the Regular Meeting of the Vadnais Heights Planning Commission to order at 7:00 p.m. on August 22, 2023.

ROLL CALL

Curt Cooper, Chairperson	Present
Jerry Moynagh, Vice Chairperson	Present
Terri Dresen	Absent
Martin Jokinen	Present
Steve Jorissen	Absent
Adam Schreiber	Present
Joseph Stumph	Present
Emily Dunn, First Alternate	Present
Joe Scrocca, Second Alternate	Present
Wonser Mongrue, Student Liaison	Present

Also present: Nolan Wall, Planning/Community Development Director; Jeff Melcoch, Cable Producer.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Upon motion by Commissioner Jokinen, seconded by Commissioner Stumph, it was

“RESOLVED, to approve the August 22, 2023, Regular Meeting Agenda as presented.”

Ayes – 7

Nays – 0

The motion carried.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Upon motion by Commissioner Moynagh, seconded by Commissioner Schreiber, it was

“RESOLVED, to approve minutes of the July 25, 2023, Regular Meeting as presented.”

Ayes – 7

Nays – 0

The motion carried.

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Chairperson Cooper opened the floor to the public at 7:02 p.m. for questions and comments on items not on the agenda.

As no one wished to address the Commission, Chairperson Cooper closed the meeting to the public at 7:02 p.m.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

A. Planning Case 23-007 – Connexus Energy – Site Plan Review at 4037 Centerville Road

Planning/Community Development Director Wall said the applicants were requesting site plan approval for expansion of the existing electrical distribution substation on the subject property. Connexus Energy currently owns and operates the substation as part of their electrical distribution system, which serves a portion of Vadnais Heights. The existing site contains two transformers within a fenced area. The proposal is to install three container-style battery containers and a collection transformer.

Jared Newton, Director Engineering and Systems Operations for Connexus Energy, shared more about Connexus as an electric utility cooperative owned by members that serviced 145,000 total members and how this would be the first project in Vadnais Heights. He said they have been here since 2018 for battery projects and on average members only experienced one unplanned outage every 3.6 years. He shared photos of similar projects in other cities then spoke how they will serve the area and growth that requires electric grid investments and planned future investments. Mr. Newton spoke about overall growth rate and shared more about the proposal to install three storage containers on the west side of the property then spoke about retaining wall options. He spoke about the reliability of Connexus and how this scenario would not play out often but how Connexus wanted to be prepared on days of extreme weather.

Commissioner Jokinen inquired about the fence location. Mr. Newton responded the fence would be near the tree canopy and showed that in the submittal it also called for a light-duty vehicle access drive on the property for battery maintenance which would be fenced separately.

Commissioner Moynagh asked about the height of the proposed trees. Planning/Community Development Director Wall outlined the tree size as proposed and said the availability of tree plantings may not be available but would be the largest trees possible.

Commissioner Scrocca inquired about safety concerns. Mr. Newton responded the area would be monitored and that safety shut-down mechanisms would be in place and how the site was not really a safety concern and should cause no damage to neighboring facilities.

Planning/Community Development Director Wall said staff toured the Ramsey facility and no concerns were raised in the event of an emergency.

Commissioner Jokinen inquired about embedded fire protection. Mr. Newton confirmed, adding the structure would be metal for the most part.

Chairperson Cooper opened the meeting to the public at 7:25 p.m.

Sherly Boehm, 4034 Alpine Avenue, said she had no concerns with safety or tree removal but asked about the south side access road and if it would be on the current property or extend into the townhome properties. Mr. Newton responded the entire access road and all proposed improvements would be located on Connexus property.

As no one else wished to address the Commission, Chairperson Cooper closed the meeting to the public at 7:26 p.m.

Upon motion by Commissioner Schrieber, seconded by Commissioner Stumph, it was recommended to approve the variance request for Planning Case 23-007, Site Plan Review at 4037 Centerville Road, Connexus Energy, based on the following findings of fact:

1. The proposed use is permitted within the applicable zoning district and is compliant with the Comprehensive Plan.
2. The proposed use is compliant, or conditioned to be compliant as part of building permit process, with all other applicable City Code standards.
3. The proposed project will not negatively impact surrounding properties.
4. The proposed project increases electrical utility infrastructure resiliency and supply across the Connexus Energy service area and is a benefit to many property owners in Vadnais Heights.

Subject to the following conditions:

1. A development agreement amendment between the property owner, and all others with interests in the subject property, shall be entered into with the City, to be recorded at the applicant's cost with the offices of the Ramsey County Recorder and/or Register of Titles, prior to issuance of a building permit.
2. Building and grading permits shall be submitted for administrative review/approval, prior to commencement of any construction activities on the subject property.
3. The applicant shall replace any major/over-story trees that are removed 1:1 and in compliance with the applicable City Code standards, to be to be administratively reviewed/approved by staff.
4. Post-construction outdoor storage of materials, supplies, products, or equipment shall be in compliance with the applicable City Code standards, to be administratively reviewed/approved as part of the building permit.
5. Existing vegetation proposed to be preserved shall be done so in compliance with the applicable requirements of City Code Chapter 38, Article IV, Section 601(11).
6. The fire protection system plan(s) shall be administratively reviewed/approved by the Vadnais Heights Fire Department.

Ayes – 7

Nays – 0

The motion carried.

OLD BUSINESS

None.

NEW BUSINESS

None.

REPORTS

A. Council Liaison

Planning/Community Development Director Wall said Council Liaison Kelly Jozwowski was unable to attend but provided her update on the upcoming radiation survey being conducted by Minnesota Homeland Security to establish a baseline of radiation released in the future. He spoke about the increase in unhoused people in the community and that the City was aware and were working to connect them with resources if they desired. He noted the goal was to provide respect for people who may not wish to receive assistance but how some activities can result in trespassing, private property issues, and other concerns.

Commissioner Scrocca asked if staff had an estimate on the number of unhoused people in the community. Planning/Community Development Director Wall said an encampment was recently cleared and that agencies were working to move people somewhere safer, adding some come in from outside the community and that staff was working to establish contact.

Student Representative Mongrue commented that she was confident the City would be able to navigate our way through this situation.

B. Planning Commissioners

Commissioner Stumph inquired about the 2040 Planning and Met Council goals. Planning/Community Development Director Wall said the data was not readily available and was forecast and market dependent but explained how the City wanted things and if not delivered it would be a hollow goal. He said projections were moving targets based on assumptions and not adjusted in real time with conditions such as financing and others. He said he hoped the housing study would provide direction on how to reach those goals.

C. Staff

Planning/Community Development Director Wall shared about the recent hiring of a Natural Resource Specialist who will assist in crafting policies as a result of the White Bear Lake lawsuit as well as work on sustainability and stormwater management goals. He said Heritage Days was held last weekend and thanked all who worked including Public Works, Fire Department, Lions and many more. He noted both items from last month were approved by City Council and that Stantec would be coming to present on the Comprehensive Housing Study soon. He noted no tour of buildings would occur but the goal was to survey existing housing stock and data to help identify future policy.

Planning/Community Development Director Wall said some communities have done similar studies including New Brighton and Shoreview and that the City looked forward to the process.

NEXT MEETING

The next Planning Commission meeting will be held on September 26, 2023.

ADJOURN MEETING

Upon motion by Commissioner Moynagh, seconded by Commissioner Jokinen meeting was adjourned at 7:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Cathy Sorensen
TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.

APPROVED