NEIGHBORHOOD INFORMATION MEETING

PROJECT: Laporte Solar Array

DATE: January 5, 2015

APPLICANT: Bella Energy

PLANNER: Ryan Mounce

CITY PRESENTATION

The meeting began with a presentation and overview of the City's development review process and timeline/milestones for the project to date:

- The project, a solar energy system, will be processed as a Type 2 use. The decision maker for the project is the Planning & Zoning Board.
- The applicants are currently planning to access the solar array through City-owned properties located to the north.
    - This action requires an access easement through City property. The access easement will need recommendations from the Natural Resource Advisory Board and Water Board and approval by City Council.
- The applicants completed a conceptual review with the City in early December, and recently submitted an Ecological Characterization Study for the project.
- The City is interested in purchasing power from the solar array if it is approved, but there is a deadline that it needs to be generating power by early summer.
- An additional mailed notice will be sent to property owners within the notification boundary two weeks prior to the public hearing for the proposal.
- Comments or questions can be sent to the project planner. Comments and concerns will be shared with the decision-maker for the project.

APPLICANT PRESENTATION

- The solar array will be approximately 3-4 acres in coverage. The parcel of ground it is proposed on is much larger, and the project will lease the northeast corner of the property for the purpose of constructing the solar array. The system size is close to 1 megawatt. The power would be purchased by and used by Fort Collins Utilities.
- Access to the array is planned off of Vine Drive, through the City-owned property to the north.
- No fixed structures are planned.
- The power generated is enough for approximately 175 homes and will help the City meet its sustainability goals.
- It is a fixed-tilt array that does not track the sun.
- Approximately 7.5 feet tall at its highest.
- Modules mounted at 25 degree tilt angle.

- Glare: The modules are designed not to produce glare; designed to absorb as much light as possible to produce electricity. Very cognizant of the glare issue.
- After the system is constructed (1-3 month construction phase), there is very little maintenance required. No building on site, no maintenance person is on site.
- The panels will not be washed; we get enough rain in the summer to wash the dust off naturally.
- Low intensity and low maintenance.

COMMENTS, QUESTIONS & RESPONSES

Question (Citizen): At seven feet off the ground at the top, and two feet off the ground at the bottom area – are you going to talk about how you fence this off?
Response (Applicant): There will be a security fence around the array.
Question (Citizen): How tall?
Response (Applicant): Six or seven feet.
Comment (Citizen): One concern I have is deer. There are deer all through this area. What's going to happen is that the deer are going to be pushed out of that area and into my property. For yourselves, you might want to put up a fence seven to eight feet for the deer – I don't know what a deer would do if it got in there. It could damage some components.
Response (City): The fencing requirement in the Land Use Code calls for a fence that is between five and seven feet in height.
Comment (Citizen): If there were no deer around, five feet would be okay.
Question (Citizen): Are you fencing only the array, or the entire property?
Response (Applicant): Only the array.

Comment (Citizen): I'm the land owner to the west of the site, so this is my entire backyard essentially. I have a number of concerns about the site and fencing and how this will blend into the natural space. The design is very important to those of us living nearby as it will interrupt our current view of the open space.

Question (Citizen): What is your construction schedule or plan?
Response (Applicant): We're performing geotechnical and due-diligence on the site in January to make sure the array is engineered correctly and the site can accommodate it. We're anticipating directional boring in March to get utility power up from Laporte. We'll be coming off Laporte underneath the canal. The actual installation is anticipated in April. It's a very low-key installation. The driving of the posts (verticle piles) is the most visible part of the installation. Racking and module installation would take place after that, with testing and mobilization and generation beginning in June and July.
Response (Applicant): Our timeline is to have full interconnection to the grid by June 30th. This is a hard date for us because the utility cannot purchase the energy from the project unless we are online by that time. We have a critically tight timeline.
Question (Citizen): Is there a lot of noise during construction?
Response (Applicant): The pile driver is the vibrating kind; it is not a large pounding that you may have seen in the past. We have used this method in the past several years. We put 2 megawatt of piers in at project at Denver International Airport within 6 work days. If you used the banger, that would have taken 6 or 7 weeks.

Question (Citizen): Have you acquired an easement to access the property across the City-owned open space?

Response (Applicant): There are two processes we have to go through from a regulatory or permitting objective. One is through the Planning & Zoning Board to get this site approved for this use. The second piece is getting the easement from the City to go through the natural area. The easement is merely to drive trucks through there in the event of an emergency or for our operations and maintenance trucks on an infrequent basis.
Question (Citizen): What would happen if the City decided it was not to their advantage to grant the easement?
Response (Applicant): I think the project would be dead.
Question (Citizen): Would it not be a consideration to go in from Laporte, from the tiny section of the parcel that fronts Laporte?
Response (Applicant): I don't think so – we looked at all of the alternatives, and we'd have to cross other utilities and two canals/ditches, which would mean building a bridge. Building an actual bridge that can sustain fire equipment is a whole manner of complexity that we couldn't manage for the project.

Question (Citizen): What goes on the ground? Is it grass or gravel?
Response (Applicant): There will be grass, we plant a native seed. Probably a buffalo grass, or whatever the City requirement is. In some of our original sites, we typically graded and put rip-rap or gravel base down, but that requires a lot of maintenance. We grub the site, but don't do grading; it will reflect the natural contours of the land.
Comment (Citizen): Are you going to kill the grass that's out there? It's probably a smooth brome, which is a tough grass to kill. If we get any rain at all, it's going to take over the buffalo grass.
Question (Citizen): If the grass gets too tall, is that a fire danger?
Response (Applicant): It's not a fire danger, it can just lower production. If it got too tall, we would come in and weed-wack it down to a lower level. We typically don't have to do much grass cutting. We want to maximize production and don't want six foot weeds either.

Question (Citizen): There is a large line of trees south of the canal – are you planning on cutting those down?
Response (Applicant): Those will remain. No trees are planned to be cut or removed.

Question (Citizen): Is this the only phase for the project, or will there be more phases?
Response (Applicant): There is only one phase; we have an allotment from the utility and what we're proposing fulfills that allotment. We sell the power directly to Fort Collins, and they buy the power and the renewable energy credits. The credits are used to help satisfy their requirements to the Public Utilities Commission that their power generation portfolio consists of so much solar or renewable sources.

Question (Citizen): Do you have a lease on the entire property, or just the section where the array is going to be placed?
Response (Applicant): Just where the array is going to be placed.
Question (Citizen): Is the rest of the parcel going to be open space. Will something else go in the remaining area?
Response (Applicant): The north parcel (City-parcel), is anticipated in the future as a stormwater retention pond. The parcel we're proposing to build on, we are just leasing the northeast corner. The parcel is privately held. This is one of the few uses the land owner has for this parcel due to its isolation/access issues, as well as floodplain issues.

Question/Comment (Citizen): What is the justification for deeming the solar array a noncritical facility, and the change to the City Code language? My understanding is that this property falls into the 100 year flood fringe, which limits what can be done on the property.
Response (City): Within the floodplain/flood fringe, many uses are not allowed, including critical facilities such as daycare, police stations, nursing homes, etc. Under current code language, solar and wind power generation are also considered critical facilities and would not be allowed at this location. There is a proposed change to City Code to allow solar/wind power generation within these areas. City Council is scheduled to vote on these proposed changes in late January; this project needs the proposed change to City Code to be approved to proceed.
Question (Citizen): Is this project contingent then on that getting approval?
Response (City): Yes, the code change is needed.
Response (Applicant): There is precedent for putting solar in this type of terrain. We built three projects in Larimer County last year and all of them were in a flood fringe. It's something that investors have become more comfortable with. With flood studies what you look for is how deep will the water get and how long it will stay on site. We're performing those studies now and our investors feel comfortable with that we have learned to date.
Response (Applicant): We would have to elevate any critical equipment above what they perceive as the flood depth.
Response (City): Related to the past several questions, these floodway restrictions have a large impact on what can presently be proposed at the site. In the future, if the City performs stormwater improvements on the parcel to the north that removes areas of floodplain/flood fringe -- that could allow others types of development in the future.

Question (Citizen): Is this area for the solar array leased for a certain amount of time?
Response (Applicant): The lease is for 20 years.
Question (Citizen): Do you still have plans to keep it going after 20 years?
Response (Applicant): The panels will still continue to work after 20 years, but we only have a 20 year contract to sell power to Fort Collins utilities; they're the only buyer in town, so if they don't want the power in 20 years, we would deconstruct the facility. In the lease we have an obligation to bring the site back to its original condition if this occurs.

Question (Citizen): I'm wondering what the process is to decide that this is in keeping with the natural habitat and mitigating the visual impacts.
Response (City): The ultimate decision-maker for the project will be the Planning & Zoning Board. Prior to the project's public hearing however, City staff and departments will review the project for compliance with the Land Use Code, and staff provides a recommendation. During the review of the project we will be closely examining the level and type of screening proposed, as well as ensuring natural areas and features are properly protected through buffer areas, wildlife movement corridors, protection of nesting habitat, etc.

Question (Citizen): Did you plant those trees along the side of the ditch, can you plant more trees?
Response (Property-owner): Along the south side?
Response (Citizen): Yes
Response (Property-owner): Yes those are mature plains cottonwoods, I could plant more.
Comment (Citizen): I own the greenhouses to the south, and those trees block me, I can't even see to where this is proposed, but some time ago the ditch company cut down the other trees that used to extend even further north.

Response (Property-owner): That was a previous property owner who cut those down, I don't believe it was the ditch company. I could plant some more trees.
Response (City): I'm hearing a preference or nods that landscaping and trees would be helpful to mitigate some of the visual impact of the array.
Question (Citizen): What about water? The trees will need water; the trees right along the ditch probably gets water from seepage.
Response (City): Without irrigation, there will be a need a requirement for ongoing maintenance and watering during establishment of any landscaping. We'd also try and find native and xeric species that would be well adapted for the site with low water requirements. Typically there are notes or development agreement language or warranties to ensure landscape plantings become established or are replaced if they die.

Question (Citizen): On the aerial imagery, it looks like there's a big disturbed area, do you know what that is?
Response (Property-owner): That's a sewer line Forney put in. I think the City had an agreement with them. Forney just sold their property and I believe a medical center is planned there.
Question (Citizen): Is that in the City limits?
Response (City): Yes, Forney is located in the City limits, this general area is a mix of City and County.