

WRIGHT TOWNSHIP
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES
SEPTEMBER 16, 2019-7:30 P.M.
1565 Jackson St. Marne MI 49435

1. The meeting was called to order at 7:30 p.m. by Chairman Dausman with the Pledge of Allegiance and a Prayer. Commission members present: Rich Dausman, Gary Karr, Steve Gray, Dan VanDyke, Steve Van Timmeren. Also present were Township Planner Brian Werschem, Township Attorney Jeff Suggett and Clerk Maureen Carmody as Recording Secretary.
2. No parking in the reserved fire spaces was announced.
3. There were no additions to the agenda.
4. A motion was made by VanDyke and supported by Karr to approve the minutes of the May 20, 2019 Planning Commission meeting as written. Motion carried.
5. There were no public comments for items not on the agenda.
6. A public hearing was held to consider a request by Michigan Electric Transmission Company (METC), 801 S. Main St., Wayland MI 49348 for a Special Use Permit for an Electric Transmission Substation and associated buildings on vacant land located north of Arthur St. and west of 16th Avenue and south of Cleveland St., Marne MI 49435, parcel number 70-06-22-400-010. Nora Balgoyen, Cynthia Stump, Karyn Boyd and Jason Sutton from ITC Holdings Corporation (ITC), of which METC is a subsidiary, were present to give information regarding the request for a special use permit. The applicant stated that the substation was necessary to relieve potential load issues and provide system reliability in the region, due to increases in energy usage and demand. This location was selected due to the existing 345kV and 138kV lines. They are planning to purchase the 40- acre parcel, of which approximately 11 acres will be utilized for the substation, and an 8' chain link fence plus 1' V-barbed wire will surround the substation. They are planning to access the parcel from Arthur St. via the existing power corridor. In their site plan, they are proposing additional screening and buffers between the substation and the Musketawa trail and existing residences. The substation will be unmanned with one transformer, and regular maintenance will be done during the day only. There will not be any perimeter lighting, and lighting installed in the yard of the substation will shine downward. The surface of the substation will be crushed limestone. Two small pre-fabricated control centers that will contain electrical equipment will also be installed in the substation. Construction is expected to begin in 2020. The applicants also presented information regarding their partnership and involvement in the communities in which they have placed substations. Commissioners engaged in discussion with the applicants regarding the project. Karr asked why it was necessary to put the substation in this location. Balgoyen replied that the reason is the proximity to the existing high-voltage lines. They do not want to create a lot of new right-of-ways to where a station is. Stump presented information regarding project review and development, and also explained that the location was ideal due to a large hub of existing energy consisting of the two 345kV lines and the 138kV line. The substation is necessary for the purpose of transforming the 345kV down to 138kV so that the energy can go out to local distribution substations. Van Timmeren asked what region will be served by the substation. Balgoyen replied that the area being served is the Grand Rapids metro region and surrounding areas. If one substation is down, another can pick up the load. VanDyke asked if they were planning to construct other substations in the area, or if they were going to pick just one site. Balgoyen stated that the Ravenna project was a Consumers Energy project. Consumers Energy needs to tap into the high voltage lines which would involve an interconnection project where ITC has a substation next to a Consumers substation. It is a separate project unrelated to the one in Wright Township. VanDyke also expressed concern regarding stray voltage, and asked what will be done to reassure the community that there will not be any stray voltage. Balgoyen replied that there would not be any stray voltage as a result of transmission. Any stray voltage would be a distribution issue. Dausman clarified with the applicants that they are involved with transmission only and not distribution, and that ITC deals with the 345kV to the 138kV only. Dausman also clarified that Consumers, a customer of ITC, never puts in substations that go from 345kV to 138kV. Dausman asked whether the substation they intend to put in is the only substation to serve the area, or

is it one of several, and how many are in the area. The applicant stated that there are 256 in the state of Michigan. The goal is to increase redundancy and reliability. Dausman also asked about stray voltage and whether stray voltage comes from the 345kV lines. The applicant replied that there is no stray voltage from the high transmission lines. There was discussion regarding the difference between static electricity and stray voltage. Van Timmeren asked what creates the crackling noise heard near high voltage lines, and will the substation increase that. Balgoyen replied that they will not be creating additional electricity. Van Timmeren also asked whether there would be any noise associated with the substation. Balgoyen replied that they do not anticipate any increase in noise. There will only be one transformer on the site, and it will be surrounded by a concrete barrier and additional screening that would help deaden any noise generated by the transformer. Balgoyen stated that the decibel level shouldn't be more than around 50-60. Karr presented information he gathered with his decibel meter at the substation on four-mile road. He said he got a reading of 53 decibels at the perimeter. He also stated that his footsteps were louder than hum of the transformer, and that 53 decibels is not more than the level of conversation. He also stated that the background noise of the field where ITC is planning to construct the substation was 40 decibels, and a man in a field mowing hay was 85 decibels and a pickup travelling on the road was 90 decibels. Steve Gray asked how the 138kV line is being fed, and was informed that the line is coming from Tallmadge and goes toward Cobb, and that substations interconnect throughout the entire west Michigan region. Dausman inquired about the physical aspects of the substation, such as the height of the tallest aspect. He was informed that nothing would exceed 80' in height, which is no higher than the existing 138kV lines.

The Public Hearing was opened at 8:23 p.m.

- Fred Sheneman, 2208 Arthur St. Marne, asked where the substation would be located exactly, and how dangerous would it be. Would it be explosive.
- Dave Schwallier, 15348 16th Ave. Marne, asked about the site plan and the space defined for future equipment, will another 138kV line be added, how much revenue would be generated for the township and who benefits. He also asked who owns ITC.
- Jeanne Green, 16453 16th Ave. Marne, read a prepared statement in which she expressed the opinion that the substation does not meet all the standards of the ordinance, and that a special land use must not have an adverse effect on nearby land. She also asked why the developer came to Wright township, and why haven't they procured already zoned commercial property. She also expressed concern regarding noise levels, lighting, EMF conditions, vibrations, and the threat to the water table. A copy of her statement was submitted to Dausman for the record.
- Matt Green, 16453 16th Ave. Marne, asked how removing AG land and replacing it with a large substation is preserving the past, and he stated that it would not meet all conditions of a special use permit, and also that an industrial substation would have a negative effect on adjoining land use.
- Ken Zahm, 204 Garfield Street, asked if they would be building a 345kV line from 8th Ave. to the substation. He also asked about unmaintained old steel power lines along the Musketawa trail, and stated that there is a collapsing structure near Taft St. He also would like notices posted on the Township website.
- Leo Carmody, 16217 16th Ave. Marne, stated that they have horses next to the ITC property, and that there would be a constant hum which would affect the animals. He also asked how many transformers can they have. He stated that ITC and Consumers don't get along, and wondered who should be called for complaints.
- Christine Austin, 15149 16th Ave. Coopersville, asked what long-term health effects there would be, and what environmental impact studies have they done. She also asked which residents were mailed a notice regarding the project and why she did not receive one.
- Dan Carmody, 16269 16th Ave., stated that his home was his retirement, and that now it is gone.
- Bonnie Thoms, 16365 16th Ave. Marne, stated that her house would be directly in front of the substation. She said it was a 12-acre substation, and asked what would prevent them from building another one if they split the land. She asked why ITC isn't putting one on the Tallmadge property which

they purchased instead of in Wright Township. She stated this is a farming community and that the area should be kept agricultural. She also asked if the land would be zoned AG or Industrial, and will her house value be reduced. She also stated that the trees they plant would not be sufficient to screen or buffer noise. She also wondered if her health issues would be worsened, and she stated that different websites show proof of negative health effects. She also felt that residents were not sufficiently notified regarding the project.

- Barry Heinz, 18224 Elder Dr., stated that if we don't stand together, they will take us down one at a time. He also stated that he is an amateur radio operator, and he wondered what is the RF and how far will it reach. He also wondered to which community the electricity would go.
- Dave Thoms, 2160 Cleveland St., asked if the substation would help our load or would it be helping Muskegon instead. He also asked why they are not doing something about stray voltage if it is generated by Consumers, which is their customer.
- Bonnie Zimmer, 15950 16th Ave. Marne, asked how many substations are near schools. She stated that many children use the trail, and asked if they would be affected. She also asked if it would affect pacemakers.
- Chris Thoms, 2688 N. Sherman Rd. Ludington, stated that he was born and raised at 16365 16th Ave. He asked if the Planning Commission had seen the Miso report, and if they had reviewed it themselves to show the necessity of the substation. He also stated that the section 308.1 of the zoning ordinance states that it needs to be reasonably necessary for the furnishing of adequate services. He asked if it was for adequate services of the community or for reliability in Grand Rapids. He also referenced design standards for substations referenced in Design Guide for Rural Substations issued in June 2001 by the United States Department of Agriculture. He highlighted site considerations, public safety, appearance, EMF signals, lighting, possible adverse effects on neighboring communities and facilities. He also asked if an environmental assessment had been done and if the Commissioners had seen the results of it. He also asked if a sound study had been done, and stated that barriers are not effective as noise abatement. He also referenced the design guide as stating that a site furthest from residences should be selected. He submitted a copy of the Design Guide for Rural Substations to the Planning Commission for review.
- Cindy Clayton, 1235 Arthur St., asked how many farmers' and landowners' livelihoods would be impinged upon through any further structures that would need to be built.
- Bonnie Thoms asked what environmental damage would be done if the oil in the substation were to go into the ground or the detention pond and into Sand Creek. She asked if a study has been done.
- Barry Heintz asked what would happen if the substation was targeted by terrorists.
- Glen Thoms, 16365 16th Ave., asked if the Township is equipped to handle a fire at the substation, and how will they maintain and keep an eye on the station so that it is safe for everybody around it.

The Public Hearing was closed at 8:57 p.m.

Chairman Dausman called for a brief recess at 9:00 p.m. The meeting reconvened at 9:08 p.m. Dausman explained the Special Use permit process, and stated that if the Special Use permit is granted, they would proceed with the site plan review. He stated that there are restrictions and conditions that they can place upon the property, and if the applicant wants to alter or change the site plan at a future date, they would need to come before the Planning Commission again. He also stated that if the applicant violates the conditions of the Special Use permit, then that permit can be revoked. The Commissioners discussed concerns voiced during the public hearing. Van Timmeren asked about notification concerns, and was informed by Clerk Carmody that the meeting was published in the Coopersville Observer and that notices were mailed to property owners within 500' of the property instead of the required 300'. The notice was also posted on the notice board at the Township Office. Dausman asked the applicants for information regarding the danger of damage to the facility by hunters, fire or terrorist attacks. Balgoyen replied that the substation would be monitored at all times and that they are connected to homeland security with regular communication. There is also a high fence with a V bar to keep people and animals out. The transformer is completely surrounded by concrete. Sutton explained

the most common cause of a fire would be a lightning strike, and that they work with local fire and police. Also stated was that their warehouse in Wayland, Michigan has crews available at all times to evaluate issues regarding safety. Sutton stated that the worst-case scenario would be an oil fire as the transformer is surrounded by oil. Stump stated that such events would be very rare and that safety is their first priority. Van Timmeren asked about comments regarding substations that are unkempt in appearance. Balgoyen replied that there are no trash receptacles at a substation, and that all trash is removed when maintenance is done. Stump stated that some substations are not owned by ITC/METC, and that this substation would be owned and maintained by ITC/METC. She also stated that they do not own the property with the damaged pole at Taft St. along the Musketawa trail, but they have an easement and can send someone to investigate. Balgoyen stated that people are encouraged to report issues, and that the security command center has 24 hour staffing. The phone number for reporting issues is 1-877-482-4829. VanDyke asked about intentions for future equipment and transformers, as the site plan indicates an area for future needs. Balgoyen replied that the intent is for only one transformer, but they planned extra space in the event more is needed in the future. Also noted was that the future needs are contained within the 11 acre footprint indicated on the site plan. Dausman asked why they acquired 40 acres if they only need 11 acres, and was informed that the parcel size was determined by what parcels are available in the area, and also to provide adequate space for a drive and to provide a buffer between the equipment and surrounding properties. VanDyke asked if a better location would be in an Industrial zoning district. Balgoyen replied that Industrial lot sizes are not large enough and/or not located near enough to the existing high transmission power lines, and that they would have to create extensive new right-of-ways (ROW) in order to connect to the substation. Dausman asked them to address additional power lines going over properties. Balgoyen stated that at this time they have not sited additional ROW. Stump stated that there is the potential to obtain a ROW to connect the 345kV to the east, but that they have not talked to any property owners yet. She stated that they do not site directly over homes, but they do site through farms. Dausman asked about taking land without consent of the owner. Balgoyen stated they like it to be voluntary, but if an agreement cannot be reached with the landowner, they do have the ability to use eminent domain as a last resort. They buy an easement and the farmer still owns and farms the land underneath. VanDyke asked them to address long-term health and environmental concerns. Balgoyen stated that all electrical objects give off EMF, and that they have documentation from the World Health Organization over the past 30 years with independent third-party studies that show there are no adverse health effects. Dausman asked if they have studies from independent sources that can be provided to the Commissioners. Stump said there is a link on their website for EMF questions. They do not have a printed study. She also stated that a tier one environmental assessment would be done after a Special Use permit is granted and the property is purchased. Dausman stated that the Ottawa County Water Resource Commission is involved in reviewing site plans, and they determine what the applicant has to do to comply and make sure there is no risk to tributaries like Sand Creek. Dausman asked how Wright Township would benefit financially. Balgoyen stated that they are tax payers, and the substation will generate high tax revenue. They are taxed on the property and personal property. VanDyke asked them to address concerns regarding adverse effects on the land values of neighboring properties, and was informed that they do not have any studies to show a direct correlation regarding a reduction in land value. Dausman informed the audience that they would be considering each condition associated with the granting of a Special Use permit. Dausman asked the applicant about RF (Radio Frequency) interference, and was informed that they did not have that information with them, but ITC has an expert that can answer the question. Dausman also addressed static electricity, and whether that comes primarily from the transmission lines or would it come from the substation as well. They explained that static electricity results from constant motion, and that there is not constant motion next to the equipment, and as people don't have access to the substation this shouldn't be an issue. Balgoyen stated that they are not generating electricity. Karr asked if the application was just for a voltage matching transformer between the two lines that intersect diagonally, and would the potential second transformer be for the purpose of bringing voltage from the line by 8th Ave. The applicant stated that transmission lines could be brought from 8th Ave. to the substation without another transformer. The applicant also stated that the application was for a Special Use permit for a substation, not transmission poles. Gray asked

if they would be installing another 138kV line, and the applicant answered that they are not. Van Timmeren clarified with the applicant that the only lines proposed are to tap into the existing high voltage lines. Karr asked Township Lawyer Sluggett about the design considerations and regulations that are not in our ordinance, and which were referenced in the public hearing. Sluggett stated that his recollection was that the person was defining essential services in a way that basically required that it be proven as necessary, and Sluggett didn't feel that was a full or complete reading of the definition of essential services. The definition of essential services clearly anticipates electrical transmission systems reasonably necessary for the furnishing of adequate service by a public utility or for public health or safety or general welfare. Dausman clarified that Sluggett was citing our ordinance, which Sluggett stated we have to comply with, and that the gentleman was citing something that required the applicant to comply with other authorities when considering the site. Sluggett also stated that the Planning Commission can require the applicant to abide by all federal, state and local laws, which presumably would address the issues raised by the gentleman. Stump noted that the Design Standards submitted by the gentleman are guidelines and not requirements. She also stated that they follow the national electric safety code when designing a substation. Sluggett clarified that he was talking about legal requirements, and that guidelines are not requirements. Sluggett listed information that the Planning Commission might want in order to make a decision, such as a report or statement from the fire department (which the Planning Commission does have), assessor information relevant to land values, a copy of the rural development guidelines (which was submitted to the Commissioners), links on the ITC website to WHO studies, the review of the water resource commissioner and the Miso study. Balgoyen gave the Commissioners a copy of emails showing communication with the Ottawa County drain commission. A motion was made by Karr and supported by VanDyke, to table a decision regarding the request by Michigan Electric Transmission Company for a Special Use Permit for an Electric Transmission Substation until the next meeting of the Planning Commission in order to review the information presented by the community. Motion carried. There was discussion regarding whether the applicants would want to request a special meeting before the next regular meeting of the Planning Commission on October 21, 2019. There was also discussion regarding how long Commissioners would need to review the materials presented. Community members were encouraged to submit additional materials or concerns in writing to the Township office for transmittal to the Planning Commission before the next meeting. Dausman listed issues that the Planning Commission would be reviewing: looking at different environmental studies and seeing how pertinent they may be, the effect on the value of adjacent lands and also the relevance of the guidelines that were submitted.

7. There were no Commission member concerns.

8. There were no Wright Township Board Communications.

9. A motion was made by Karr and supported by VanDyke to adjourn the meeting at 10:23 p.m. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted by,

Maureen Carmody,
Recording Secretary