



TOWN OF WILSON

SHEBOYGAN COUNTY, WISCONSIN

Seeking Resident Input on Solar Arrays as a Conditional Use in the Town of Wilson

Many of us here in The Town of Wilson have been following the Onion River Project in the Town of Holland. The solar farm involves 450,000 panels on about 1000 acres of farmland. Last August, Two Creeks broke ground on a 500,000 panel array on 800 acres. Solar farms are one way that utilities are filling the gap as coal-fired electric generating plants are closing. Of the state's seven coal-fired plants, four are closing between 2021 and 2025, including our own Edgewater plant. Meanwhile, Wisconsin already has 25 utility-scale solar facilities running as of February 2021, with three more announced soon after. In the coming years, we are likely to see many more solar, wind, and other alternative power generating plants.

While rooftop panels and other customer-sited solar installations have been around for some time, these large, utility scale solar projects are so new that municipalities are still developing ordinances to cover them. Sheboygan County does not have ordinances related to solar but rather leaves the matter up to municipalities. Accordingly, the Town of Wilson is currently developing zoning ordinances to cover the issues related to such projects. Installation of a ground-based solar array is a conditional use in the Town of Wilson, so these projects will be subject to a period of public comment and careful evaluation by the Plan Commission and the Town Board.

Among the questions raised by these new conditional uses are:

- What is the impact of a solar array on existing vegetation, soil, and wildlife?
- How does the panel array affect the site's drainage, stormwater and watershed capabilities?
- Does the project create traffic?

And of course, there is the question of aesthetics. A lot of folks are in favor of clean energy, but they don't want to be looking out the window at a hundred wind turbines, for example. At the same time, a thoughtfully constructed solar array can have unexpected benefits beyond making use of renewable energy. For example, a solar array can support underlying vegetation and bee habitat. Such projects also have fewer runoff problems than typical agricultural uses.

Those who regularly read the agendas posted on the Town website will already be aware that the Town just received its first pre-application for a conditional use involving a 10-acre solar array. The project would be sited on property owned by Millipore Sigma on County Road A and Kurscheid Court. This project is part of the statewide SOLAR NOW initiative by WE Energies that the Wisconsin Public Service Commission approved in 2019. The proposed solar racks stand about 8'6" tall (about as high as field corn) and would be surrounded by a 6-foot fence. The Plan Commission has not yet considered this application, as the Town is developing ordinances to address some of the issues that projects like this one might raise.

When the Plan Commission does prepare to consider this conditional use for Millipore Sigma's solar array, we hope residents will come to Plan Commission meetings with their questions and input during the public comment period. Folks who cannot attend the meeting can submit their questions and comments via email to one of the Town Supervisors, and their input will be shared with the Plan Commission.

Opportunity for public comment is standard procedure for conditional use permits, including announcing the time and place for public comment in the Plan Commission agenda. The agenda is published online at the Town website and posted at the Town Hall. To view agendas online, navigate to townwilson.com. under the INFORMATION tab, select TIMELY NEWS. In addition, property owners within 300 feet of any project seeking a conditional use permit receive a notice in the mail with the time and place to provide their input.

Thank you for considering giving your input,

Sincerely,

Erik Thelen - The Town of Wilson Plan Commission