



City of Ann Arbor
Formal Minutes
City Planning Commission

301 E. Huron St.
Ann Arbor, MI 48104
<http://a2gov.legistar.com/Calendar.aspx>

Tuesday, November 20, 2018

7:00 PM

Larcom City Hall, 301 E Huron St, Second floor, City Council Chambers

- 10-b** **18-1953** 2001 Dhu Varren Road, Phoenix Substation Expansion Planned Project Site Plan for City Council Approval - Proposal to expand the footprint of the substation at the southwest corner and construct a monopole on this 12.87-acre site. Natural features are proposed to be impacted. A Planned Project is being requested to accommodate the height of the proposed tower. (Ward 1) Staff Recommendation: Approval
City Planner Jeff Kahan provided the staff report.

PUBLIC HEARING:

Douglas Miller, 2291 Canyon Court, Ann Arbor, said he's lived at this location for 20 years; his bedroom overlooks the substation. He said for every year the substation gets worse. There used to be a nice woodsy area between his house and the substation, but the trees have all died. He expressed concern for big trucks, heavy industry, and continuous lights being on. Miller said there were no provided elevation plans showing the proposed project and he can't envision what it will look like. He noted that the substation is already located on a high elevation (maybe 50 feet higher than the road) and landscaping is not enough, especially if they aren't required to replace trees that die.

Noting no further public speakers, the Chair declared the public hearing closed.

Moved by Gibb-Randall, seconded by Sauve, that the Ann Arbor City Planning Commission hereby recommends that the Mayor and City Council approve the ITC Phoenix Utility Substation Planned Project Site Plan to allow a 100 foot tall monopole, a 70 foot tall lightning mast, and a 65 foot tall H frame structure. Consistent with the Planned Project standards for approval, the petitioner is providing setbacks in excess of what code requires.

COMMISSION DISCUSSION:

The Commission took into consideration the presented petition and

discussed the matter. [For a complete record of the discussion, please see available video format]

Brett Lenart explained that this site was annexed into the City as part of the City initiated annexations a few years ago; the existing structures and site would have been site planned through the Township, if they had a site plan requirement at the time of construction. Lenart said the City requires the site to be maintained as it was approved by the City, and any landscaping that might not survive, will be required to be replaced by the owners. He noted that the City's Unified Development Code (UDC) required all stations and substations to go through a standard site plan review where the code must be met.

Milshteyn requested the applicant explain what the proposed structures will look like, which they did.

Ackerman asked for verification that the proposed additional structure would be constructed on the southwest area of the site. He requested the petitioner to review the landscaping plan, and their long term plan for keeping landscaping alive.

The petitioner reviewed the landscaping plan with the Commission.

Gibb-Randall suggested that the proposed arborvitae be replaced with other species since the deer will likely consume it all within the first winter; she noted that the proposed tree species were also smaller in stature, while she preferred to see taller species that would help with the screening.

Cynthia Stump, Project Manager for the Petitioner, explained that DTE has owned and operated the substation since 1968 and when ITC was sold, they acquired the high voltage equipment from DTE. She said ITC agrees with the Commission that trees that have died need to be replaced adding they are in favor of the right trees in the right place. Stump said each proposed tree and location is determined by asset: overhead equipment and underground transmission lines. She said they can't have trees on the western side, because there is a transmission line coming into the site from this direction, and they can't have trees under their power lines. She said their long term plan is to keep the trees and landscaping alive.

Ackerman noted that the proposed stormwater system will be able to mitigate the 100-year storm. He requested the petitioner review the

system with the Commission, which they did, explaining their infiltration system was reviewed and approved by the Washtenaw County Water Resource Commissioner; a gravel pad and or crushed gravel system is standard use in their substations. The added weep holes in the new retaining wall is something new for them.

Ackerman enquired if the petitioner has seen a need to increase their systems throughout the State due to increased storm events.

Stump explained they always meet the required storm events, depending on the floodplains in the area of their stations. She said if they begin to see water-pooling on their sites, their Engineer team works with the local jurisdiction to determine the cause. She said the cause for added run-off is usually new development in the vicinity, while in her 15 years of service in the industry she has never seen a whole site water-pooled. She believes it is because they construct their stations at a higher elevation, specifically for this reason. Stump said they do constant inspections of their asset sites as well.

Gibb-Randall noted existing erosion on the southern side, pitching towards the retaining wall. She said with Traver Creek being right there, how will grading be done. Gibb-Randall said she would like to know that there will be an active eye on the hill erosion on the site.

The petitioner's Engineer explained that since the floodplain goes right up to the base of the hill it leaves them without many options. They said they have fulfilled all requirements and codes.

Mills asked about lighting of the site, pointing out that a minimally lit site would make them good neighbors as well as help them abide by the City's code.

Briggs asked about possible camouflage of the monopole.

Stump said the standard in Michigan, for the monopoles, is to use steel given the amount of grey days here. She said they don't paint them any specific color.

Sauve asked about the timeline for the proposed temporary bridge, and what measures will they take for ruts left by trucks

The petitioner's Project Manager said it the temporary bridge would be installed for access across Traver Creek to put in the monopole and

remove any vegetation that needs to be removed – possibly 2 months or less. He said they would mat any ruts left by trucks, which is on their Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) permit. The impacts to the hill will be as minimal as possible.

Woods asked about noise on the site and if the additional equipment will make the site noisier. She also asked about ownership of the site and if the proposed project will provide better service to that area of the City. She asked if the existing noise from the site is within the City's noise ordinance.

The petitioner said the new equipment would not add any additional noise to the site, noting that noise is usually created by the hum of transformers. They explained that ITC Holdings Corporation and DTE will collaborate their services on this substation; ITC will own the high voltage equipment while DTE owns the transformers, and the goal of these improvements is to provide better capacity which results in less outages.

Jeff Kahan responded that the existing noise as well as construction noise from the site would need to be in accordance with the City's noise ordinance. He said the hum does not come close to the 60 decibel noise limit per City code.

The petitioner said there will be a 24/7 phone contact number provided on the site for anyone to call with complaints and enquiries.

Woods enquired about the transmission lines coming into the site, and if construction had begun or would begin.

The petitioner said they are wrapping up construction by Dhu Varren and Nixon Roads, and restoration has been completed.

Milshteyn said the only way he would feel comfortable with supporting this project, he would like to add a condition that ITC address the erosion, instead of running directly into Traver Creek. He said we have one shot to address this now and if we don't it won't be looked at.

Gibb-Randall said the site is too steep to allow infiltration they would like to see, but erosion repair is possible.

Woods expressed support for a postponement to allow WCWRC to weigh in on the issue, given the complicity involved.

Milshteyn asked how a postponement would affect the project.

Lenart said he wasn't sure if a postponement could solve the issue; however if the Commission felt comfortable, they could require ITC provide information to staff, to allow them to vet their approach, as this project progresses to City Council, they can assure that issue is addressed. He said the requirement would include soil erosion repair and maintenance measures that are mitigated over the long term, above and beyond the City's site plan review requirements.

Woods said she felt comfortable with staff's approach.

Lenart noted that another provision added to this Planned Project Site Plan also further adds satisfaction of the requirement of a Planned Project, going above and beyond the minimum WCWRC standards, potentially, and our steep slope standards, potentially, thereby being another justification the Commission, and ultimately City Council, could consider

Moved by Gibb Randall, seconded by Mills, that ITC provide details that address soil erosion repair and long term maintenance of such area, the potential of redirection of stormwater; revisit evergreen species along eastern boundary.

VOTE ON AMENDMENT:

On a roll call vote, the vote was as follows, with the Chair declaring the amendment carried. Vote: 9-0

Yeas: 8 - Wendy Woods, Erica Briggs, Sarah Mills, Alex Milshteyn, Shannan Gibb-Randall, Scott Trudeau, Zachary Ackerman, and Elizabeth Sauve

Nays: 0

Absent: 1 - Julie Weatherbee

CONTINUED COMMISSION DISCUSSION ON MAIN MOTION:

Briggs enquired if there was a need for the chainlink fence to be transparent or if a green fence could be used.

The petitioner said it was their standard to use a transparent chain-link fence for security reasons.

Mills asked for clarification on the motion.

Lenart said the intention is to answer these questions about the special along the eastern boundary and the stormwater potential, soil erosion stabilization, so that when the project progresses to City Council the issues were answered per your direction before such time, and not just let the issues keep moving on.

Mills said she felt that the soil erosion is the project benefit – the trade off. She said a Planned Project in exchange to meeting some of the criteria above what we usually require, such as a height limit that exceeds our requirement, preserving natural features. She said being a good steward by preserving Traver Creek is the preserving natural features benefit here, and it's really important that we not do the easy thing, but the right thing, if it is possible. She expressed support for the project moving forward to Council, if, her concerns could be incorporated into such a transmittal.

Staff acknowledged her request.

VOTE ON MAIN MOTION:

On a roll call vote, the vote was as follows, with the Chair declaring the amended motion carried. Vote: 9-0

Yeas: 8 - Wendy Woods, Erica Briggs, Sarah Mills, Alex Milshteyn, Shannan Gibb-Randall, Scott Trudeau, Zachary Ackerman, and Elizabeth Sauve

Nays: 0

Absent: 1 - Julie Weatherbee