

CITY OF WASHINGTON, ILLINOIS

Special Planning and Zoning Commission Meeting

Wednesday, August 16, 2023 at 6:30 P.M.

Washington Fire Department Training Room - 200 N. Wilmor Road, Washington

Call to Order Chairman Mike Burdette called the regular meeting of the City of Washington Planning and Zoning Commission to order at 6:29 p.m. A quorum was established.

Roll Call *Present:* Commissioners Burdette, Milot, Reeder, Ritter, Scott, Shelton
Absent: Commissioner Williams
Also present: Planning and Development Director Oliphant and City Clerk Brod

Public Comments None provided.

Public Hearing
Item A: Request by Richard and Pamela Robertson for a three-foot side yard variance and a one-foot distance between structures variance at 305 Lynnhaven Drive

At 6:30 p.m., Commissioner Burdette opened the public hearing to consider the variance request. Planning and Zoning Director Oliphant explained there is currently a 10x10 shed that Richard and Pamela Robertson would like to replace with a 10x16 shed. The location would shift to from one foot off the property line to two feet off the property line and as a result, it requires a variance of three feet from the north property line. Mr. and Mrs. Robertson shared that the current shed has been there since 1964 and is an eye sore and the current shed has a tarp.

No public comments were provided and at 6:32 Commissioner Burdette closed the public hearing. Commissioner Ritter motioned to accept the request; Commissioner Scott seconded. On roll call the vote was:
6 Ayes: Burdette, Milot, Reeder, Ritter, Scott and Shelton
0 Nays:
Motion carried.

Public Hearing
Item B: Variance request of Oasis Electric on behalf of Catrina Roush to allow a ground-mount solar array at 1505 Pine Tree Drive

At 6:33 Commissioner Burdette opened the public hearing to consider the variance request to allow a ground-mount solar array. Mr. Oliphant explained that Oasis Electric is applying on behalf of the homeowner. He shared that our code doesn't allow ground-mount solar arrays yet. He noted that the owner has said the roof is inadequate for a roof-mount and this would allow for two ground mount arrays in the back of the property. Mr. Oliphant shared that the lot is about two acres and there are several trees around the house. The proposed arrays would be about 9'2" above ground and 210 feet from the principal structure. Mr. Oliphant shared that there is a tree that has been removed that does not appear in the photos. He also shared that the nearest house is 110 feet away, another house is 170 feet away and a third house is 245 feet away. Mr. Oliphant explained that you can make a hardship case due to the trees. Mr. Oliphant also explained that Council has discussed whether to allow ground mounts on residential properties and it is Council's desire to draft an ordinance that would allow ground mounts on a minimum two-acres, with a setback of 30 feet. This is tentatively coming back to Council in October.

The representative from Oasis Electric/Sun Collectors stated that the state is in transition to shut down coal plants by 2030 and this has caused rates to double or triple from current rates. He shared that their rates are currently over \$500 and could be over \$1000. He noted the inflation rate for power is 13-14% per year. The representative stated that this ground-mount will offset about 89% of their electricity. He also stated that the State of Illinois is pushing solar and our ordinance that is prohibiting ground-mounts has hurt the residents. He stated that this will allow Washington to continue to see revenue from permitting fees. Mr. Roush shared that they cut down a couple trees and to cut down all the trees would cost them \$10,000-15,000. He feels this could increase the property values.

Jeff Ryan who lives on Shellbark Court feels this will negatively affect his property, especially since there are no regulations. He shared that this will be in direct view of his home and it will drastically change the look of the neighborhood. He stated that it will occupy the size of the footprint of the principal house structure. This could adversely affect his property value. Mr.

Ryan shared that their residential appeal is wide open views and this doesn't fit. He questioned why the petitioner's utilities are so high and stated that this doesn't fit the proposed code changes. He requests this to be denied.

Jim Fussner from Pine Tree Drive shared that these will be able to be seen directly from his chair in his living room. He also doesn't know where they are getting high energy bills as his 5,000 square-foot home is only \$200 dollars per month. He stated that people spend a lot of money to get that size of property and it is not to look at solar panels. He stated that he is not opposed to roof mounts, and he doesn't want to argue with his neighbors, but says he worked hard for 23 years to make his property look good and now this could adversely affect his value. He also requests it to be denied.

Everett McNees on Westgate stated that he moved to this subdivision, to have space to see nature not solar panels. He feels this will devalue properties, but he is unsure how much. He is opposed to having solar panels. He asked what is the beauty of having the extra space. He is very opposed to this and the ordinance. Mr. McNees shared that he has been on the Board of Appeals and appreciates everyone's work on this.

The representative from the solar company shared the size of the proposed array. He noted that most of the power cost comes in the winter which is how he gets \$585 per month. Mr. Rousch said he spoke to neighbors who said they don't mind, and those neighbors are interested as well. He stated that they would be open to planting trees on the property line if this helps to accommodate the neighbors.

Mr. Ryan stated that the appeal is the view and they like being outside. They would intentionally have to not look that way to avoid it. He shared that the array would be closer to their houses than the owner's house. He said that he sympathizes with the power costs, but they should look at other means of power as well. Mr. Ryan feels this would significantly degrade the curb appeal.

One resident noted it would take 20 years for the trees to grow tall enough to hide it.

Mr. Fussler said this won't raise his property value and their property is highly sought after because of the view.

Mr. Ryan stated that he has a roof that is ideal for solar panels but was reluctant because he was worried about affecting others' property values. He shared that he has done his research and disagrees about this raising property values.

The representative from the solar company stated that as more and more of these are installed, we will get more of these requests.

Mr. Ryan feels the representative's comment is a threat and there needs to be more restrictions before allowing these.

Commissioner Burdette noted the ordinance change that was directed by City Council is for non-residential properties.

Commissioner Scott called point of order during the discussion at which time the conversation of aesthetics continued until Commissioner Burdette clarified that they can only vote on what is being proposed.

At 6:58 p.m., Commissioner Burdette closed the public hearing.

Commissioner Scott stated that solar is coming and noted the many homes getting it. He noted that we just started doing ground mount for non-residential and set visual restrictions. He stated that they have only started talking about this and he doesn't feel comfortable deciding on something not yet set in place. He noted that you can put a large shed with solar panels but not ground mounts and it could affect visually as well. He also doesn't want him to cut down all his trees to put them on his roof. He said if we do this variance this will set a standard. He would like to see the zoning thing done then they can come back later after it is written. Commissioner Scott stated that we have to decide as a City how to handle this and we are not there yet.

Commissioner Reeder said there will be more standards than just a 10-foot fence.

Commissioner Scott clarified that a commercial site has to have a 10-foot fence and the ground mount can be more than 10 feet.

Mr. Oliphant noted that non-residential and residential components will be brought back.

Commissioner Milot stated that he has reservations due to height, square footage and glare. He thinks a better approach is for them to be in touch with their Council person and share ideas about what will work and not work. He stated that it wouldn't surprise him if the State makes it not okay have an ordinance that doesn't allow these. He feels there is more to be considered.

Commissioner Scott wants to look at this as an opportunity as they are writing the new code.

He said we don't want this to be an industrial powerplant. He wants restrictions and screening.

Mr. Oliphant noted that some communities, like Normal, have a 4-foot height restriction and the two-acres size requirement would be larger than many communities. Any more than that may prohibit most of them anyway.

Commissioner Milot noted the importance when competing with other communities because people may build their house in another community that allows it. He shared that he is not yet ready to support this.

Mr. Oliphant noted that previous discussion addressed when roof mounted arrays were not possible.

Commissioner Reeder stated that there should be height and setback requirements.

Mr. Oliphant stated that if the Commission would like, they can table this for a later date without an additional fee.

Commissioner Scott amended his motion and motioned to table the vote; Commissioner Ritter seconded.

On roll call the vote was:

6 Ayes: Burdette, Milot, Reeder, Ritter, Scott and Shelton

0 Nays:

Motion carried.

Adjournment At 7:16 p.m. Commissioner move Milot; Commissioner Reeder seconded to adjourn.
Motion carried by voice vote.

Valeri L. Brod, City Clerk