

Geneva Lake Conservancy Land Management Committee Meeting
Minutes of the Advocacy Committee
Friday, December 20th, 2024
3:00 p.m., 398 Mill Street, Fontana WI 53125

A meeting of the Advocacy Committee of the Geneva Lake Conservancy, Inc. took place on Friday, December 20th, 2024. In attendance were Ms. Freytag, Mr. Johnson, Ms. Johnson, Ms. Constable, and Mr. Olsen. Staff present were Ms. Theys acting as Secretary, and Ms. Yancey, Executive Director.

The meeting was called to order at 3:20 pm.

- I. Welcome (Kristen Freytag)**
- II. Proposed Whitewater Solar Farm Project**

Ms. Freytag started the meeting stating that the proposed solar farm project will cover approximately 2,500 acres of land in both LaGrange and Whitewater. She stated that Mr. Zinzow, a long-time supporter of the GLC, reached out about his concerns over the size, noise, and location of the project. She then reported that a friend of hers owns a company called Convergence Energy, who is very familiar with solar panel projects. He stated that solar panels typically no longer experience the noise levels they once did due to updated technology and placement of the converter. Ms. Theys stated that Mr. Zinzow emailed an example video of the noise produced from the solar farms in Michigan, which could reach up to a 1.5-mile radius. Ms. Freytag stated that Mr. Zinzow would like GLC to request that an Environmental Impact Statement be conducted by the State Energy Commission.

Ms. Theys reported that herself and Mr. Nickelsen visited Mr. Zinzow's home recently to discuss the project and look at the oldest oak tree along the Nordic Trail. She stated that his biggest concern was how we can approach the issue from an environmental perspective. She also reported that she suggested reaching out to Zach Kron, who is the SEWRPC Wildlife Biologist, to see if he had any input on the project. Ms. Yancey reported that there is a 3,000-acre solar farm that was installed in Darien recently. She stated that the farmers who want to implement the project on their land will receive significant compensation to do so. She suggested that we would like to still support the use and switch over to solar energy over a variety of other energy sources, but do not agree with the location of the project. The committee then discussed the map that was included in the meeting materials. Ms. Theys stated that Mr. Zinzow's wife Holly reported that the project comprises around 67 different property owners. She also mentioned that one of the locations is Lurvey's sod farm. The committee then discussed the possibility of planting native under the solar panels to help improve infiltration. Ms. Freytag reported that there is approximately \$5.4 billion that will be spent on renewable energy. Mr. Olsen reported that there has been almost no knowledge of the project around the Whitewater campus community. He stated that it was proposed that a solar project be placed on top of the old landfill near the campus. He explained that solar projects should be primarily placed on already impervious surfaces such

as parking lots. He also mentioned that the alternative array on the map in purple near downtown Whitewater, which would be in the industrial area.

Ms. Yancey asked how the soil is on properties that are proposed for the project, to which Mr. Olsen stated that the majority are Prime Agricultural soils, but that younger generations are no longer interested in farming. Ms. Freytag stated that the farmers who are joining in on the project would be making two to three more times profit than they would just farming it. Mr. Olsen stated that Whitewater needs housing and was not surprised that these large tracks of land would be used for either housing or solar development. Mr. Olsen asked exactly how close this project will be to the natural areas of concern. Ms. Theys stated that the project is closest to LaGrange Lake and some of the trail systems near the lake. She also reported that they did not clearly delineate in their mapping any of the natural features and tried concealing the location of them in relation to the proposed solar panels. Ms. Yancey stated that the siting of this project may be detrimental to the conservation values of nearby properties, therefore requesting an environmental impact study to learn what the implications will be to the nearby natural lands. Mr. Johnson restated that we should encourage they should seek out areas that are already developed for placement of the solar farm. Ms. Freytag brought up that areas that already have solar farms should have healthier soil than areas that are continually farmed. Mr. Olsen stated that it is easier for the developer to reach out to a limited number of farmers rather than the effort reaching out to numerous residential owners. He also stated the issue is to get over that energy threshold amount that is needed for the project to occur.

Ms. Theys reported that she reached out to Ms. Finucane with the Ice Age Trail Alliance, who stated that they have reached out to the National Park Service regarding the project. Ms. Finucane reported to Ms. Theys that the Park Service will be the one to take a stance and relay any information on the project. Ms. Constable shared her concern of the proximity to the hiking trails. Mr. Johnson asked if we even need to comment or take a position on this project. Ms. Yancey stated no, but that we can simply ask that the environmental impact statement be completed and that we ask them to consider other potential locations for the project to be implemented on. Ms. Johnson asked what the timing of this project is, and Ms. Yancey brought up the December 23rd comment period to the State Commission. Mr. Johnson discussed the impacts of normal farming vs. the installation of solar farms. Mr. Olsen brought up the online interactive map that shows more detail for the exact proposed locations for the solar farms, the environmental features, and the trail systems. A channelized portion of Steel Brook creek was shown to have proposed solar farms installed on either side of it, which Ms. Theys stated she believes is a Class I trout stream. Ms. Yancey questioned if any portion of the Ice Age Trails goes through the proposed solar farms. Ms. Johnson asked what the timeline for project completion is, to which Mr. Olsen stated they want to start work in 2026 with completion in 2028. Mr. Johnson stated we should be concerned about taking a stance on this because we could lose credibility and members. The committee agreed that we are not sure on the exact impacts of solar farms on things such as tourism, trout streams, etc. Ms. Johnson stated that we should send a letter stating in general that we support solar farms, but we have concerns over the following issues, and

would like answers for these concerns, or would like the statement to be conducted. Ms. Yancey stated that she will write up a statement letter to be submitted for public comment to the State Commission.

III. Other Issues

Ms. Yancey brought up that that we are proceeding with meeting with Liam from Topography for further discussions related to The Preserve proposed development and the potential for implementing a conservation easement on the property. Ms. Yancey brought up her concern over all the old oak trees that are being cut down around Walworth County, and that fines should be up to \$10,000 for each tree cut down. She stated that we should work on the creation of an ordinance this winter to present to the Villages and County for the cutting of trees with no exemptions. Ms. Theys mentioned properties that are enrolled in the DNR's Managed Forest Law Program will have to be exempt. Ms. Yancey stated that she will be meeting with the former mayor to discuss the current direction for the Hillmoor property. Ms. Theys brought up the footage we received of the water runoff issue into Delavan Lake. Ms. Yancey stated that it should be added to the next Advocacy meeting. Ms. Freytag added that we should think about who we want to get involved regarding the issue and who to show the footage to. Ms. Constable showed photos to the committee of the neighboring property to hers that has had various large trees cut down.

Meeting Adjourned at 4:10pm