

Board of Adjustment Meeting Minutes – May 20, 2026

The Muscatine County Board of Adjustment held a Public Hearing at the Environmental Learning Center on Friday, May 20, 2026 at 6:00 p.m.

Present: Tom Harper, Emily Geertz (Vice Chair), Michael Smock, Janelle Spies (Chair), and Ashley Spittler

Absent: None

Staff Present: Eric Furnas, Morgan Othmer, and Jake Boucher

Case #26-05-02 An application has been filed by Olympus Solar Energy LLC. If approved, the request would allow the Zoning Administrator to issue a Special Use Permit to allow the installation of a utility-scale solar energy system. The affected properties are located in Goshen, Pike, and Wapsinonoc Townships, South of Highway 6 and East of Highway 70, containing an approximate 1,000 combined acres, and are zoned A-1 Agricultural District.

- Steve Morris, with Invenergy, gave an overview of the project.
 - Invenergy is a Midwest based company that currently has 18 projects in Iowa.
 - The Olympus Solar Project will have approximately 200 megawatts of solar generation and up to 210 megawatts of battery energy storage.
 - The project is expected to use approximately 1,000 acres for the solar panels, battery storage equipment, project substation and other supporting infrastructure.
 - Invenergy has made a point to be active in the community. They donated to local organizations and hosted public meetings to share project information. They intend to be present, accessible, and supportive throughout the project.
 - Next, Steve explained how the solar panels and battery storage will work together. The panels will be mounted on trackers that will follow the sun to help maximize energy production. The panels are made of non-hazardous materials that are primarily glass, silicon, and aluminum. The batteries will be housed in structures similar in size to a shipping container.
 - A variety of research and studies were completed to develop the area responsibly. Studies were done to analyze environmental resources, determine ground surface types and soils, and to maximize energy generation. These studies led to the development of the presented Project Constraints Map that shows where constraints exist and where the project can be placed. These constraints consist of flood plains, existing transmission lines, roads, setbacks from homes, and environmental features such as wetlands.
 - Steve spoke about the Vegetation & Soil Management Plan for the project. The plan focuses on establishing and maintaining low growing, regionally appropriate species. The topsoil is preserved to support long term soil health and vegetation success.
 - Landscape screening will be used to reduce visual impacts for neighboring property owners.

- A draft Road Use Agreement has been completed to establish how the project will use county roads and make any needed repairs. Before construction begins, they will conduct a pre-construction road survey and will work with the County Engineer to coordinate haul routes.
 - Steve explained that safety is a top priority. The site will be monitored 24/7 and will have detailed checks following major weather events. All facilities will be secured with code compliant fencing. There will be controlled entry points to ensure that only authorized personnel can gain access. The project will carry general liability insurance to cover any damage. An Emergency Response Plan has been drafted that outlines coordination with local emergency responders and procedures to protect workers, landowners, and the community.
 - Portions of the project will be in the flood plain. Those portions have been designed to be elevated out of the flood plain and will comply with requirements of the Muscatine County Floodplain Management Ordinance.
 - A decommissioning plan has been developed to ensure that facilities be removed and the land be restored at the end of the project's life.
 - Steve reviewed how the proposed project will meet all requirements in Section 2 of the Utility-Scale Solar Energy Systems Ordinance.
 - Steve reviewed the answers to the questions on the Special Use Permit Application.
- Next, Board of Adjustment members asked questions.
 - Mike asked about the noise from the project and if the decibel level described would be during construction or after construction and where the noise would be?
 - Steve answered that a noise analysis was completed across the entire project area and that noise level was from a receptor that was taking in the most amount of noise, near the battery storage and substation.
 - Emily asked about areas on the project map that are shown in the project area that have no solar panels on them?
 - Steve answered that some of those areas will contain underground cables and that ground would still be able to be farmed.
 - Tom asked if the ground identified in the project area would be leased?
 - Steve answered yes.
 - Ashley asked how the project would lower energy costs?
 - Steve explained that costs would be lowered because of the increase in renewable energy production from the project.

- Ashley asked what the plan would be if a tornado were to damage the project and scatter debris on surrounding properties?
 - Steve explained that there is remote monitoring that will change the panel angle to reduce damage from hail, wind, and tornados. The glass on the panels is designed to shatter similarly to how a car windshield would.
 - Kate, with Invenergy explained that they would begin by notifying landowners. If they are a participating landowner, they will notify them that they will be on the property to clean up. For a non-participating landowner, they will work with them to get permission to be on the property. Next, they will document the area and block it off, typically with a snow fence. Then, employees will either use equipment or walk through the area to pick up the debris.

- Ashley asked about the estimated economic benefits of the project and if that is primarily during construction?
 - Invenergy representatives confirmed that was correct.

- Mike asked about the project being sold after construction?
 - Kate explained there are several different ways to handle solar projects. The project can be built and then sold to a customer, such as a large utility, or you can enter into a power purchase agreement where Olympus would continue to operate the project and sell the power to the customer. At the time the project becomes operational, there is usually a contract in place.

- Ashley asked what would happen if the company (Olympus/Invenergy) were sold?
 - Kate explained that if the project was sold, all the obligations (from the commitments in the application and agreements such as the Road Use Agreement) would transfer with the project and would still have to be met.

- Mike asked what sort of vegetation was going to be used?
 - Rob, with Invenergy, explained that they will use native and naturalized grass and legumes.

- Ashley asked if the 4-6 employees would work seasonally?
 - Steve explained that they are year-round employees.

- Next, public attendees provided comments. The following attendees spoke:
 1. Kyle Barnhart
 2. Mark Smith
 3. Rob Smith
 4. Phil Wiese
 5. Zach Morris

6. Billie Danner
7. Keith Barnhart
8. Davina Holladay
9. David Schmidt
10. Chaz Allen, representing Iowa Utility Association
11. Alan Feldman
12. Neal Nelson
13. Mark Patton
14. Russ Van Acker
15. Jason Taylor
16. Susan Johannson, representing Muscatine County Energy District
17. Brad Long, representing Laborers Local 309

- In Summary, 12 attendees stated they were in favor of the project, 1 attendee asked questions, and 4 attendees spoke about their concerns. Those concerns about the project included:
 - It would take up high quality farm ground.
 - It would be located too close to surrounding homes.
 - It would diminish property values.
 - It would generate too much noise.
 - It would not preserve the land and native species.
 - It would not hire local employees.
- After the public comments, Eric then provided the Board with staff comments.
 - He recommended that if the board considers approval that they stipulate that any obligation made by Olympus as part of their application be verified and subject to final approval by the County Development Office.
 - He explained that the Road Use Agreement is currently under review by the County Attorney's Office and recommends that any potential approval be subject to the final approval of the Road Use Agreement.
 - He asked the board to also consider stipulating that general liability insurance be kept on file with the Development Office and updated annually.
- Next, Board of Adjustment members asked additional questions.
 - Mike asked if there were any studies completed on animals in the area?
 - Tiffany, with Invenergy, responded that they had completed a series of pre-construction studies. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has a system they use called the Wind Energy Guidelines. There is no system in place for solar projects, so they followed the system used for wind projects. This includes a site characterization study. For the study, they contacted the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Iowa DNR and sent out requests for records on threatened or endangered species and sensitive habitats. Habitat surveys were also completed by a third-party consultant. Using the results, a buffer will be established between the project and the identified

habitats. Best Management Practices will be in use during construction, including the use of fencing to keep animals away from vehicle traffic.

- Ashley asked what the setbacks/buffer for the identified habitats would be?
 - Tiffany answered that they voluntarily apply setbacks, as there are no requirements currently in place. The buffer that is shown on the constraints map is 100’.

- Mike asked if there is undisturbed native land in the project area, as mentioned during the public comments?
 - Tiffany explained that there is a parcel in the Conservation Reserve Program that has a sand prairie.
 - Kate explained that they are aware of that area and plan to complete additional studies on it. If it is determined that the area is suitable habitat, they would apply an exclusion area/setback from it.

- Mike asked about the potential for runoff and contamination caused by water used to fight a fire?
 - Matt, Fire Protection Consultant, explained that the plan is to position and contain the batteries so that if they do burn, they are able to burn within the containment unit, and the fire would not spread. They would not use water and would let the fire burn out. Soil contamination is not a concern as there are no contaminants present in the batteries.

- Janelle asked if the substation could be moved, in response to the public’s concerns about noise.
 - Kate explained that the location was selected after considering many alternative locations. The location was selected because of the proximity of existing infrastructure. They could provide additional screening to help mitigate the noise.
 - Steve explained that the battery storage will be 1,400 ft. from the nearest residence.

- A motion was made by Ashley Spitler to close the Public Hearing at 7:55 p.m. and was seconded by Michael Smock.
 - Ayes: Tom Harper, Emily Geertz, Michael Smock, Janelle Spies, and Ashley Spitler
 - Opposed: None
 - Motion approved.

- A motion was made by Tom Harper to grant the Special Use Permit to allow a utility-scale solar energy system with the following stipulations:

1. Approval of the Special Use Permit is conditional upon the final approval of the Road Use Agreement.
2. All obligations made by Olympus Solar as part of their application must be verified and are subject to final approval by the County Development Director.
3. Financial surety will be posted prior to the commencement of construction and will be provided in the form of a performance bond.
4. General Liability insurance must be kept on file with the County Development Office and must be updated annually.
5. All construction and operations stay away from any native prairie land.
6. Additional screening must be provided, as requested, to help with noise reduction.

Motion seconded by Michael Smock.

- Ayes: Emily Geertz, Tom Harper, Michael Smock, Janelle Spies
- Opposed: Ashley Spittler
- Motion approved.

- The meeting was adjourned at 8:06 p.m.

MUSCATINE COUNTY BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT
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