Austinburg Township

Zoning Commission Public Hearing

September 2, 2026

Members:

Laurie Robishaw, Chair
David Gottwig, Vice-Chair
Diego Moreno
Clare Polak
Lisa Vicente
Teresa Gottwig, Alternate (absent)
Shara Parkomaki, Alternate (absent)

Also Present:
Sarah Frank, Zoning Secretary
Byron Dutton, Trustee Liaison
John Kusar, Trustee
Luke Gildemeister, Reactivate

Mandy Eusner, Resident
Joe Petti, Resident
Cynthia Pizzuto, Resident
Ed Pizzuto, Resident
Ted Seifert, Resident
Rebecca Stone, Resident
Kevin Bailey, Jefferson Resident
Dave Conrad, Jefferson Resident
Dan Kowalski, Rock Creek Resident
Debbie Kowalski, Rock Creek Resident

Chair opened Public Hearing at 6:03pm. Chair requested roll call attendance:

Laurie Robishaw - Present
David Gottwig - Present
Diego Moreno - Present
Clare Polak - Present
Lisa Vicente - Present
Shara Parkomaki - Not Present
Teresa Gottwig - Not Present

Secretary read aloud and displayed the proposed amendment, as submitted to County Planning Commission. Chair opened the floor for comments.

David Conrad asked for clarification and suggested that the drafted regulations allow a random business to use its 15-acre solar farm to run its radio and sell the rest back to the grid. Chair and Vice-Chair clarified residential vs commercial and under 50MW vs. over 50MW. Trustee Dutton clarified that the state has total control with anything over 50MW. Chair stated she sees his concern, explained it is difficult to write regulations and they are seeking guidance to protect homeowners.

Rebecca Stone expressed her concern that farmland is disappearing and stated that the draft was written well.

Dan Kowalski described solar panels at his residence; Chair clarified this draft would not affect those.

Ted Siefert said he doesn't want to see solar panels in the NC District which is "pretty much residential". He thinks Commission should be more conservative on protecting the property values and rural appearance since your job is not to ensure every commercial entity is happy and leave it up to the ZBA to give a variance if necessary. He suggested limitations in size, percentage of building square footage, and roof-only. He said a township's purpose is to protect people and ensure it enacts regulations voters want.

Ed Pizzuto suggested limiting solar panels based on the capacity needs of the business. David Conrad wondered if regulations could limit businesses by requiring excess energy be charged to their batteries instead of sold back to the grid.

Trustee Kusar spoke as a landowner. He had spoken to several other large farmers in the Township. With the exception of one person who said solar systems should not be allowed, the farming seniors all wanted to allow it and uphold property rights. He further stated that he pays taxes on his property that he paid $250,000 and is now valued by the County Auditor at $930,000; a solar farm doesn't hurt anything

and he would rather have a solar farm than a housing development. When he received a concern about 16 acres farmland for sale that could be destroyed, he advised those with a concern to pool their money and purchase it themselves for turning into crops.
Trustee Dutton noted that it is more convenient to install a solar farm than to plant beans - and more profitable.

Trustee Kusar explained the relationship of CAUV to solar power and that it is similar to a standard oil or gas lease (that it is up to the lessor to pay those taxes).

Chair introduced invited speaker, Luke Gildemeister, US Solar Project Manager for Reactivate; he introduced handouts on-screen. He explained that his company acquired the land rights to 14 acres for a commercial solar system. He further explained that there is only 1 substation in the township that cannot handle more than 3MW. If his system is installed, there would be a disincentive for any other project to spend $1.7 million to make it feasible.

As requested by Chair, Luke Gildemeister reviewed "Reactivate Solar: Proposed Revised Language for 1000.414 Small Solar Facilities Less Than 50MW" on-screen, summarizing each of his 22 drafted regulations:
1. Proof of interconnection agreement and has to be studied.
2. Decommissioning surety so that township is not left with a non-operating eyesore; set aside money in a bond to have that cash available so township is protected.
3. Panel height - already covered in current proposed amendment - you're not going to see more than 6-8 feet.
4. Distribution lines - the electrical wiring between panels have to be underground.
5. Fencing - most rural townships tend to prefer pagewire fencing with wooden posts.
6. Noise - can't make noise; inverters can make a small humming noise.
7. Multiple parcels - some landowners have tiny parcels so it wouldn't make sense to restrict the parcels but maybe pay a fee per parcel - since some are hundreds of acres and some are 5.
8. Vegetation management - developer should plant habitat under the panels, requirement to plant it and maintain it or township notifies you and you have to fix it.
9. No batteries allowed - company we acquired this project from actually proposed batteries - we could talk extensively about why batteries so prohibited.
10. Plant habitat that is pollinator friendly - helps with infiltration and stormwater runoff.
11. Signage saying name of project, operator, address, phone number.
12. No lighting - most are not, some will have motion sensor lighting.
13. Tree screening - the most common is eastern red cedar, most are planted about 6 feet apart.
14. Security - have self-locking gate, lockbox, allow township to inspect site.
15. End of life - take everything out within 9 months, return site to what it was prior.
16. Setbacks
17. Glare - control.
18. Environmental - site assessment and wetland has to take place.
19. Aviation - no hazard to navigation letter.
20. Community meeting - you should be talking to people being transparent about what you are doing, inform the public, incorporate modifications based on input.
21. Construction permits - pretty basic, have to get from county.
22. Road use agreement - have to set aside another chunk of cash in case you damage the roads, typically a road use plan/agreement talk to township to choose haul route.

Upon request from Chair, Luke Gildemeister read aloud on-screen letter from Jeff Bowles, property owner. He suggested his company could demolish the dilapidated house and clean up the yard junk.

Trustee Kusar asked if there is ever any problems with theft of copper. Luke Gildemeister stated it was a reasonable question but that he had never seen any trespassing in his 5 years of experience.

David Conrad questioned how a solar system could utilize 5 parcels; Luke Gildemeister agreed a developer would not build a non-congrous project by having more than one fenced area; lots would need to be combined. Chair agreed land-stacking was a concern the draft tries to address.

Rebecca Stone questioned why Commission would let a company write legislation and if the company is putting in "loopholes that we don't see". Chair responded that she had requested what considerations a company would have and what code would look like if residents want to regulate under 5MW. Trustee Kusar stated zoning commissions often go to surrounding areas to research an issue. David Conrad answered that "the back door is the substation" and added that Saybrook is getting an upgrade right now.

Vice-Chair asked Luke Gildemeister how deep does the project go to regulate decommissioning; he answered the general rule of thumb is 3 feet below the surface but Commission could be extra clear and make the regulation include everything underground.

Kevin Bailey asked if CAUV incremental taxes end at the end of a decommissioned project. Trustee Kusar replied yes and that it is a private lease between the landowner and the solar company but there is a grace period of perhaps 2 years to put it back into farming.

Vice-Chair questioned how the community benefits; Trustee Kusar questioned if there was a similar project in a township where the public records could show tax revenue, understanding it would be an estimate for Austinburg Township. Luke Gildemeister stated landowners make more money on solar systems than forestland and that he could provide a tax revenue breakdown from one of his seven projects in Illinois.

Ed Pizzuto asked the life expectancy of the purposed solar panels; Luke Gildemeister answered the warranty is 30 years with a life span of 25-40 years.

Ed Pizzuto and David Conrad suggested the Reactivate project would prevent others from connecting to the substation; Ted Seifert suggested it was not affordable to do so anyways. David Conrad further suggested the Reactivate project would stress the substation and a new one would have to be built.

Chair explained the timeline for the proposed amendment. David Conrad and Trustees present discussed community involvement in the issue. Chair adjourned the public hearing at 8:00pm.

Austinburg Township

Zoning Commission Public Hearing
September 2, 2026

Members:

Laurie Robishaw, Chair	Teresa Gottwig, Alternate (absent)	*Also Present:*
David Gottwig, Vice-Chair	Shara Parkomaki, Alternate (absent)	*Sarah Frank, Zoning Secretary*
Diego Moreno		*Byron Dutton, Trustee Liaison*
Clare Polak		*Rebecca Stone, Resident*
Lisa Vicente		

Chair opened the meeting at 8:10pm. Chair requested roll call attendance:

Laurie Robishaw - Present	*Clare Polak - Present*	*Shara Parkomaki - Not Present*
David Gottwig - Present	*Lisa Vicente - Present*	*Teresa Gottwig - Not Present*
Diego Moreno - Present		

Clare motioned to approve 8/5/26 minutes with a spelling correction; David seconded. Roll call vote:

Laurie - Aye	*Clare - Aye*	*Shara - Not Present*
David - Aye	*Lisa - Aye*	*Teresa - Not Present*
Diego - Aye		***Minutes approved.***

Zoning Administrator was not present but sent a report of nothing new.

Chair stated her concern that Commission members' names are present on documents but that members absent or opposed should not be listed. Secretary and Commission discussed; Commission agreed Chair continues to sign documents but the body of the letter should include the membership list with recorded votes.

Chair stated the proposed amendment should be discussed further at the next regularly-scheduled meeting, once members have feedback from the County Planning Commission, as well as time to absorb the Public Hearing feedback; Commission agreed.

Chair announced she will email members her research on data centers and wind energy for their review before the next regularly-scheduled meeting.

Vice-Chair motioned to adjourn the meeting; Clare seconded. Roll call vote:

Laurie - Aye	*Clare - Aye*	*Shara - Not Present*
David - Aye	*Lisa - Aye*	*Teresa - Not Present*
Diego - Aye		***Meeting adjourned 8:55pm***

Respectfully Submitted,

Sarah Frank

Sarah Frank, Secretary