



**Champaign County Board
Environment and Land Use Committee (ELUC)
County of Champaign, Urbana, Illinois**

MINUTES – Approved as Distributed October 9, 2025

DATE: Thursday, September 4, 2025
TIME: 6:30 p.m.
PLACE: Shields-Carter Meeting Room
Bennett Administrative Center
102 E. Main St., Urbana, IL 61801

Committee Members

Present	Absent
Aaron Esry (Vice-Chair)	
John Farney	
Jennifer Locke	
Emily Rodriguez	
Jilmala Rogers	
Eric Thorsland (Chair)	

County Staff: John Hall (Zoning Administrator), Andrew Muller (Assistant State’s Attorney) and Mary Ward (Recording Secretary)

Others Present: None

MINUTES

I. Call to Order

Committee Chair Thorsland called the meeting to order at 6:33 p.m.

II. Roll Call

Roll call was taken, and a quorum was declared present.

III. Approval of Agenda/Addendum

MOTION by Mr. Farney to approve the agenda; seconded by Mr. Esry. Upon voice vote, the **MOTION CARRIED** unanimously.

IV. Approval of Minutes

A. August 7, 2025 – Regular Meeting

MOTION by Ms. Locke to approve the August 7, 2025 minutes; seconded by Ms. Rogers. Upon voice vote the **MOTION CARRIED** unanimously.

V. Public Input

Matt Corray, Mahomet, spoke on the proposed solar project. The land has been farm-ground forever. Within an acre of the property there are bald eagle nests and other wildlife. It is not a great idea to place a solar farm there in proximity to Spring Lake and over an aquifer.

Tyler Bozarth, Mahomet, is against the solar project. Removing about an acre of trees is the opposite of protecting the environment. It will also ruin the value of homes in the area.

Alexis Godbee, Mahomet, spoke against the solar project. She enjoys watching the wildlife in the area and tries to be a good environmental steward. Problems have been documented with solar farms. It is not being built or run to benefit the community. A petition has been started against the solar farm to date has 370 signatures.

Karen Hansen, Mahomet, stated this issue is too important to stand on the sidelines. We must protect the Mahomet Aquifer. How will the solar farm be affected by a high-water table? How will this affect Spring Lake and the Sangamon River? What happens if they damage the river or the aquifer.

Moira Cronin, Developer Mahomet Solar Farm 1, spoke in favor the project at Mahomet. They are a long-term owner and operator, and they are not going anywhere. She stated they are not removing an acre of trees. They are trying to contribute to the state goal of producing 100% clean energy by 2050. She went over the findings. They have done all the environmental studies. They are aware of drainage issues and will move drainage tiles as needed. It includes non-hazardous solar panels.

Diana Hanson, Mahomet, spoke in opposition to the solar project.

Linda Hambleton, Mahomet, strongly opposes the Mahomet solar project, the loss of prime farmland and the project being placed next to a residential neighborhood. It should not be converted for this project. Concerned about the degradation of land. The use of heavy equipment will compact the soil and worsen the drainage issues they already have. Solar farms in rural areas decrease the value of homes. There are bald eagles and other migratory birds that live there that will be disrupted.

Dave Sproul, Mahomet, opposes the solar farm. They've asked for the waiver regarding roads as they don't want to pay for repairs. The project name, Mahomet IL Solar 1, shows the intent for expansion.

Debbie Bunch, Mahomet, wants accurate information from the developers. The number of solar panels changed from meeting to meeting. She drove by their solar farm on Market Street, and it did not look like it had been mowed. She also questioned the noise testing equipment and calibration. She had questions about how the community subscriptions work. The DSRP states it will be restored to meadow condition – it's not meadow now.

Cheryl Sproul, Mahomet, there is no farmland to spare. This is not benefitting the immediate community. Need to consider the impact on environment, neighborhood, township, the county and state.

Mike Murphy, Mahomet. He is President of the Spring Lake HOA. An overwhelming majority of the HOA is opposed to the solar farm. Information was sent to the committee.

Diana Harmon, Mahomet, agrees with all the others who spoke against the solar farm project. Not against solar, she opposes this location.

Philip Carper, Seymour – via email. He would like the Committee to re-address the rooster regulation, type of fowl and quantity for all residential neighborhoods in Champaign County. They have several coops within a block and a half of their home. Some have roosters and other fowl that make shrill whistling noises at all times of the day and night.

VI. Communications

Mr. Esry reminded the Committee that harvest is right around the corner. The U of I has already started chopping silage. Farmers will be out on the road, and everyone needs to be aware and watchful for the farm equipment.

Mr. Thorsland thanked those in attendance for making their opinions known. He shared some facts about farmland and solar. The biggest loss of farm ground around Mahomet is the development of Mahomet. He then shared some solar farm facts. Only .01% of acreage is in solar. EMF is less than a toaster. Solar panels do not leach chemicals. The biggest risk from storms is to the developer. All the findings from the ZBA in the affirmative. This is not the final vote tonight. This goes to the full County Board for final approval.

VII. New Business: Items to be Approved by ELUC

- A. Recreation & Entertainment License** for Araceli Gutierrez for a Spanish Rodeo at the Champaign County Fairgrounds, 1302 North Coler Avenue, Urbana, IL to be held on September 7, 2025.
- B. Recreation & Entertainment License** for Araceli Gutierrez for a Spanish Rodeo at the Champaign County Fairgrounds, 1302 North Coler Avenue, Urbana, IL to be held on October 5, 2025.

OMNIBUS MOTION to approve Recreation & Entertainment License for Araceli Gutierrez for a Spanish Rodeo at the Champaign County Fairgrounds on September 7 and October 5, 2025 made by Ms. Rodriguez; seconded by Ms. Locke. Upon voice vote, the **MOTION CARRIED** unanimously.

VIII. New Business: Items to be recommended to the County Board

- A. Zoning Case 162-S-25.** A request by Mahomet IL Solar 1, LLC, c/o Summit Ridge Energy LLC, via agent Moira Cronin, Senior Manager, Project Development, and participating landowners Paul Nurmi Trustee, and Greater Heritage Farms LLC to authorize a Community PV Solar Farm with a total nameplate capacity of 4.99 megawatts and totaling approximately 36 acres in the AG-2 Zoning District on the South side of US Highway 150, in the West Half of the Northeast Quarter and the East Half of the Northwest Quarter of Section 17 Township 20 North, Range 7 East of the Third Principal Meridian, in Mahomet Township, commonly known as farmland owned by Greater Heritage Farms LLC and Paul Nurmi Trustee with the following waivers of standard conditions:

Part A: A waiver for not entering into a Roadway Upgrade and Maintenance Agreement or waiver therefrom with the relevant local highway authority prior to consideration of the Special Use Permit by the Zoning Board of Appeals, per Section 6.1.5 G.(1).

Part B: A waiver for locating the PV Solar Farm less than one and one-half miles from an incorporated municipality per Section 6.1.5 B.(2)a.

Part C: A waiver for locating the PV Solar Farm 65 feet from a non-participating lot that is 10 acres or less in area in lieu of the minimum required separation of 240 feet between the solar farm fencing and the property line, per Section 6.1.5 D.(3)a.

Part D: A waiver for providing financial assurance for the Decommissioning and Site Reclamation Plan in the form of a surety bond, in-lieu of a letter of credit per Section 6.1.5 Q.

MOTION by Ms. Locke to recommend County Board approval of a resolution approving Zoning Case 162-S-25; seconded by Ms. Rodriguez.

Mr. Hall started the discussion by giving the recommendation from ZBA. ZBA gave affirmative findings for Waivers Part A, Part B and Part C; they recommended a denial of Part D. There was an abstention on the vote. There was a vote against, two members absent; it failed even though the findings were affirmative. They will need to provide a road agreement before they can get the permit. The state law was sent out with the notes and the project meets and exceeds the standards.

Ms. Rodriguez asked if we have allowed the Part D waiver before. Mr. Hall stated that we have not been able to amend the ordinance. Surety bonds also require a certain credit rating. Ms. Rodriguez questioned about community outreach and public meetings.

Mr. Thorsland said screening/fencing are required of the developer. All environmental impact studies have been done. The map we have shows about an acre of trees that need to be cleared. Need to clarify that with the developer as they said no trees would be cleared.

Ms. Rodriguez asked the developer about their community outreach efforts. They have been done in other areas. They chose not to do one here as it gives time for opposition to mobilize. They do plant a pollinator friendly seed mix and trees around the perimeter. Trees would grow to 10-12 feet in height. Ms. Rodriguez added that it is not a requirement for community outreach, but likes it when they do that. Not sure if that requirement could be put in the ordinance.

Mr. Thorsland asked about the trees that are being removed. They are being removed as to not to create a shadow over the solar panels, not for placement of the solar panels. It does not extend farther than the fence. They will be planting a significant number of trees. The are planted at 5 feet and will grow 10-15 feet tall. Mr. Thorsland also said regarding the Part D waiver regarding surety bonds, he is inclined to go with the ZBA findings and vote to not allow the Part D waiver.

The developer stated that AIMA (Agricultural Impact Mitigation Agreement) state law allows for surety bonds. She read a statement from their application explaining AIMA and how a surety bond is more secure than a letter of credit. They have never not been granted this waiver. This would create a hardship for them. They would really prefer to do escrow instead of a letter of credit. They have done this with other counties.

Mr. Hall stated that AIMA allows the county to determine the type of financial assurance. AIMA doesn't state that it needs to be a surety bond. The State's Attorney provided information to ZBA that says that a letter of credit is better for the County than a surety bond. Discussion regarding the use of surety bonds needs to happen. We would have to change our ordinance. She tried to argue that other counties have done it.

Ms. Rodriguez said that she is happy to follow the advice of the State's Attorney and just wait. If we want to pause and review this policy, why not. Mr. Thorsland asked, if she wanted to wait on the whole case? Yes. It would also be an opportunity to offer a town hall. Her vote tonight would be a no. She has two process issues that she has issues with. This is just her suggestion.

Ms. Locke added that she trusts the legal advice from the State's Attorney's Office as to what is best for the County. The developer would really prefer to do escrow. A short discussion on escrow ensued. Only three local banks have the credit rating for the letter of credit. They would like to pursue escrow as an option. Mr. Farney said when the ordinance was written, they said this is what's needed, and the State's Attorney backs it up. We would need to check with the State's Attorney about escrow. The County Board could vote on an escrow account rather than a letter of credit.

Mr. Muller from the State's Attorney's Office was present. Ms. Locke asked if there has been any study of escrow and solar farms. No, but we do have them with wind farms. It would be ok if the question of escrow goes to the full County Board.

Mr. Farney asked if Summit Ridge, as the developer, receiving any federal funds? There are no USDA grants available. They would be eligible for the IRS tax credit. There is also some for using U.S. made components. He also asked if the labor would be local or from out of the area. This is bid out. They have worked with local labor before. It's just too early at this time for that.

Mr. Farney said this goes to the full County Board regardless of tonight's vote. He is concerned that they couldn't find somewhere besides next to a residential neighborhood to build. Also, Springfield does not always know what is best for the counties. He will be a no on this tonight.

Mr. Esry echoed many of Mr. Farney's comments. He shares some of the same worries as the people who have spoken tonight. One of the biggest reasons to vote no is that Springfield said you can't say no. Zoning needs to be back in the hands of the County. He will be a no tonight.

Ms. Rogers added that she will also be a no tonight. The pictures that had been provided made a difference.

Mr. Thorsland said there are a lot of places to site a solar farm. When you buy a property, you don't own the view. That owner also has property rights. The project not only meets state standards, but it also meets our as well. He will be voting yes on this to move to the full County Board for discussion. He encourages everyone to attend and voice their opinion.

Ms. Rodriguez said she had never heard a developer say outright, that they skirt public input.

Discussion was held to clarify what is being voted in and if there was a need to amend the motion. It was determined the original motion as made was to be voted on.

A roll call vote was called for. The **MOTION** to Recommend County Board Approval of a resolution approving Zoning Case 162-S-25 for Mahomet IL Solar 1 moves to the County Board as a **denial** with a vote of 2 yays and 4 nays.

- B. Decommissioning and Site Reclamation Plan for Zoning Case 162-S-25.** A request by Mahomet IL Solar 1, LLC, c/o Summit Ridge Energy LLC, via agent Moira Cronin, Senior Manager, Project Development, and participating landowners Paul Nurmi Trustee, and Greater Heritage Farms LLC to authorize a Decommissioning and Reclamation Plan for a Community PV Solar Farm with a total nameplate capacity of 4.99 megawatts and totaling approximately 36 acres in the AG-2 Zoning District on the South side of US Highway 150, in the West Half of the Northeast Quarter and the East Half of the Northwest Quarter of Section 17 Township 20 North, Range 7 East of the Third Principal Meridian, in Mahomet Township, commonly known as farmland owned by Greater Heritage Farms LLC and Paul Nurmi Trustee.

MOTION by Ms. Locke to recommend County Board approval of a resolution approving the Decommission and Site Reclamation Plan for Zoning Case 162-S-25; seconded by Ms. Rodriguez.

Mr. Hall stated that reviewing these are a challenge. This one was the most different one they've seen. It does fall within the range of prices like other DSRP's and staff sees no problems.

Ms. Rogers asked him to clarify what he meant by different. These can't be compared on a line-by-line basis. They compare on dollars per acre and dollars per kilowatt.

Upon voice vote, the **MOTION** to Recommend County Board Approval of a resolution approving the Decommission and Site Reclamation Plan for Zoning Case 162-S-25 for Mahomet IL Solar 1 moves to the County Board as a **denial**.

- C. Zoning Case 130-AT-24.** Amend the Champaign County Zoning Ordinance to add "Battery Energy Storage System" as a new principal use and indicate that a Battery Energy Storage System may be authorized by a County Board Special Use Permit in the AG-1 Agriculture, AG-2 Agriculture, B-1 Rural Trade Center, B-4 General Business, I-1 Light Industry and I-2 Heavy Industry Zoning Districts; add requirements and fees for "Battery Energy Storage Systems"; add any required definitions, and make certain other revisions to the Ordinance as detailed in the full legal advertisement.

MOTION by Ms. Locke to recommend County Board approval of a resolution approving Zoning Case 130-AT-24 to amend the Champaign County Zoning Ordinance; seconded by Ms. Rogers.

Mr. Hall said this had changed a lot since it was approved to go to hearing. They recommend this as a County Board Special Use Permit. The fire safety requirements meet NFPA855. ZBA reviewed the study of a thermal runaway event. Air plume modeling showed particles could seep to nearby principal buildings up to a ¼ mile away. These also had three different BESS developers review the ordinance.

A part was accidentally omitted. The following should be added to proposed section 6.1.8C.:

- (5) The minimum SIDE and REAR YARD for TIER-2 BESS equipment other than fencing and electrical inverters is 100 feet.
- (6) Electrical inverters for TIER-2 BESS shall be located as far as possible from property lines, other than railroad property lines and electrical substation property lines, and consistent with good engineering practice. Inverter locations that are less than 275 feet from the perimeter fence shall require specific approval and may require special sound deadening construction and noise analysis.
- (7) TIER-2 BESS fencing shall be no less than 26 feet from the property line of any adjacent lot other than lots for railroad property and electrical substation property.

There was some discussion whether to amend the ordinance with the addition and then vote on the amended ordinance or to send this back to the ZBA to go through the correct process.

Mr. Thorsland felt it should go back to ZBA as there are no pending applications for this. Mr. Esry said he had no problems with this going back to ZBA. Everyone felt we should follow the formal process.

Mr. Hall said this will add more protections in the ordinance.

MOTION by Mr. Esry to remand back to the ZBA to be considered at the earliest possible time; seconded by Mr. Farney. Upon voice vote, the **MOTION CARRIED** unanimously.

IX. Other Business

A. Monthly Reports -None

There were no monthly reports.

X. Chair's Report

There was no chair's report.

XI. Designation of Items to be Placed on the Consent Agenda

There are no items for the Consent Agenda.

XII. Adjournment

Committee Chair Thorsland adjourned the meeting at 8:32 p.m.