

**OFFICIAL PROCEEDINGS OF THE
RICE COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION
Commissioner's Room / Government Services Building
Thursday, February 5, 2026 at 6:00 PM**

I. Call to Order

A. Roll Call

The meeting was called to order both in-person and electronically by Chair Garrett Johnson at 6:12p.m.

Members present were: Garrett Johnson, Kenneth Engen, Matt Purfeerst, Jim Cihak

Members absent were: Julia Hogan

Staff present were: Zoning Administrator Trent McCorkell, Senior Planner Jeremy Edwards, Office Support Specialist MacKenzie Klett.

Commissioners present: Charlie Peters

Others present: see Sign-in Sheet and Registrant List.

B. Motion by Ken Engen, seconded by Jim Cihak, Reading of the Notice

RESULT: Approved, AYES: Garrett Johnson, Matt Purfeerst, Ken Engen, Jim Cihak, NAYS: None

C. Motion by Matt Purfeerst, seconded by Ken Engen, Approval of the Agenda

RESULT: Approved, AYES: Garrett Johnson, Matt Purfeerst, Ken Engen, Jim Cihak, NAYS: None

D. Motion by Jim Cihak, seconded by Matt Purfeerst, to approve the minutes of January 8, 2026.

RESULT: Approved, AYES: Garrett Johnson, Matt Purfeerst, Ken Engen, Jim Cihak, NAYS: None

II. New Business

1. Interim Use Permit/Thompson - Section 18, Walcott Township

RPMN Solar 1, LLC, on behalf of landowners Daniel and Lynda Thompson, has applied for an Interim Use Permit for a 1MW solar energy production facility. The property is described as: Part of the NW1/4 of the NE1/4, Section 18, Walcott Township, Rice County, Minnesota. PID# 15.18.1.25.001. Property address: 23021 Albers Ave, Faribault, MN 55021. The property is Zoned, A, Agricultural.

Motion by Ken Engen, seconded by Jim Cihak, to recommend approval of the Interim Use Permit with the following conditions and findings for RPMN Solar 1, LLC, on behalf of landowners Daniel and Lynda Thompson. The property is located in Section 18 of Walcott Township.

RESULT: Approved, AYES: Garrett Johnson, Matt Purfeerst, Ken Engen, Jim Cihak, NAYS: None

CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL – Thompson (RPMN Solar 1, LLC) – Interim Use Permit (IUP)

1. The landowner and operators shall comply with all rules, regulations, requirements, or standards of the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Army Corps of Engineers, and other applicable federal, state or local agencies.
2. The Interim Use Permit (IUP) is for a 1-MW ac solar energy production site as shown on the approved 11-6-2025 application site plan, subject to meeting all setback and access requirements.
3. Solar panels must be at least 100-ft from County Road Right of Way, 70-ft from Township Road Right of Way and 20-ft from other property lines.
4. Security fence shall consist of fencing meeting state and federal electrical code requirements.
5. All required permits shall be obtained prior to onsite construction.
6. Removal of existing onsite trees shall be done to the minimum amount necessary.
7. A septic compliance inspection shall be completed on any septic system on the parcel prior to issuance of a building permit for the solar project. If any septic system is found to not be in compliance a compliant system shall be shown to be in place within one year of the IUP approval.

8. With the building permit application for the project the applicant shall submit proof of compliance with Minnesota wetland rules.
9. As soon as onsite construction is completed all areas of the site, excluding the access roads and electrical equipment pads, are to be established and maintained in Agricultural crop production or a pollinator friendly perennial vegetative cover.
10. All electrical lines internal to the site and to the location of the interconnection point with the power utility shall be buried underground, except those lines within the fenced area may be above ground as long as they are lower than the panel heights and meeting electrical codes.
11. A stormwater plan and proof of compliance with state/federal stormwater regulations shall be submitted to Rice County Environmental Services with the application for building permits.
12. The applicant or operator shall furnish Rice County with a \$50,000 bond or other approved financial surety to ensure proper site decommissioning/restoration and to ensure road repair or repair for other off-site damages caused by construction or operation of the facility. Financial surety shall be reviewed and approved by the Rice County Attorney's office prior to any work on-site.
13. The entire site shall be restored to a condition suitable for agricultural crop production prior to expiration of the Interim Use Permit (IUP) unless a new IUP has been approved for continued solar use.
14. Failure to comply with conditions may result in revocation of the Interim Use Permit.
15. This Interim Use Permit (IUP) shall expire by the earlier of: one (1) year from the County Board approval if no construction has begun, eighteen (18) months after electrical production has ceased, or twenty-five (25) years from the commercial production start date. Site restoration/reclamation must be completed prior to the expiration if no renewal has been approved. The applicant/operator of the IUP must notify Rice County Environmental Services of the commercial production start date.
16. An evergreen vegetative screening shall be required between the solar fence area and the neighboring house property line, located to the west of the solar site. Screening shall consist of a single row of evergreen trees with an initial height of 3-ft and with not more than 15-ft spacing between the trees.

Hearing Minutes:

Zoning Administrator Trent McCorkell (TM) presented the request to the Planning Commission (PC).

KE - Did they get the wetland stuff approved?

TM - They have gone through that in the past, but as site plans change it tends to change approvals. So, they need to go through stuff again. Wetlands and solar are a little more of an unusual situation for how the wetland rules work. Dealing with solar in the past, generally you can put panels in a wetland area. It's the roads and some of the other things that get to be a little trickier.

The PC asked the applicant, Erin Takata (ET), to come forward to add comments or answer questions regarding the request.

Mandy Bonoblust (MB) - So we're here because we did revise the site boundary to optimize the site a little bit better. We changed the layout just a little bit. There are no changes to the total megawatt or output here. But there's less overall earth disturbance and less tree clearing needed with this updated design. To answer the question about the wetlands, we did do a wetland delineation out here. We did previously go through the Wetland Conservation Act compliance process. We have done that again for the additional wetland impacts, and we have a purchase agreement already signed for bank credits that I have with me, if you need a copy of that. We don't execute it until we get these permits, and Renewable Properties is on the phone if there's a question I can't answer.

MP - What side of the road, that 230th, are the power lines going to run on? The south side or the north side of the road? I just see the box goes above the road. Do you know where the transmission lines are going to go?

MB - I do not.

CP - The neighbor that wrote a letter, and I believe last time they were here they testified against it, is there any screening proposed to the south for that neighbor?

MB - I don't know that any is proposed at this time. I don't think we heard from that landowner for this round of permit updates.

CP - We received a letter.

MB - Oh, you did for this one? Is this it?

CP - It's in front of you now. If at all possible, work with the neighbor on some screening or something.

MB - Yeah, I don't know if Renewable Properties, if you guys want to comment on committing to that.

ET - We have not seen this. If there is an existing tree line we wouldn't normally, I don't know if that would provide the adequate screening requested, but we can certainly be open to discussing with them.

CP - I think one of the questions they have is that there is a very nice stand of trees on the property. Will they be removed?

ET - That is kind of what I was talking about. I mean if it doesn't encroach with the current design, definitely not. I don't believe they would be but I'm not sure, PB are you aware?

Pedro Leon De La Barra (PB) - The design change that we proposed that required this new permit was made specifically to avoid tree removal and to maintain the trees on the south side of the lot. There will be minimal tree clearing so most of those trees will be able to be preserved.

MP - I see on the same letter, the one house is worried about looking at steel link fence and some steel stands behind their house. Will there be any screening directly behind or to the east of the existing house in the solar farm?

PB - There is no screening being contemplated at this point in our design.

MB - We did have some questions on the conditions, is that now or later?

GJ - Right now, we can take a look at them.

MB - The first question is on condition #7, the septic system compliance inspection. It says that septic compliance inspection must be completed. The septic system is not on the property or the area that Renewable Properties is proposing the solar project. It's associated with that house to the west. So, we're either wondering if we can remove that condition, or at least not let it hold up issuance of the building permit.

GJ - Staff can speak on it more, but I believe they just put that in there if there is a septic system on site.

TM - That actually came from staff in the office. What they have told me is there is at least a holding tank system from the shed that's there on the property. So, it is something that is on this property, associated with the shed there. And when there have been septic systems on a site that we do in Interim or Conditional Use, it's pretty common that we have the septic condition.

GJ - So the holding tank or septic system that is for the shed would need to be in compliance for the permit on this property.

MB - The other question we had was on condition #15, the expiration part of that. We just want to confirm the renewal process and the requirements for that, and the main question is if the renewal process begins before expiration of the permit, or if it applies in the event that the system is online for a period past the 25 years of the COD.

TM - That condition's probably a little bit different than what you had before. We've made some changes to how we've dealt with solar interim permits for these expirations. So, what you had before was the one year to get things going, and that still is the case. That's within our ordinance, so there's not really a choice there. I believe previously we also had the 18 months after the electrical production would cease. So, once it starts, if it stops for that long, it would expire. One that's different is the 25-year from when it initially starts, and that's what we've been doing as a standard one for that. Process for renewal on that would be the same as amending this. It's a new one. You know, we don't know what'll be in place in 25 years exactly, but that is, assuming everything would stay current, that would be the process.

ET - That makes sense. That is what I had noticed, just that the conditions were slightly different than this and didn't include the 25 years previously. So, thank you for the clarification.

MB - Yes, thank you. That's all we have.

Chair Johnson opened the public testimony portion of the item to the public and no one spoke.

Chair Johnson closed the public testimony portion of the item to the public.

Discussion:

GJ - I know we go back and forth depending on the project with screening. But I think with how close it is to the house, I'd be inclined to have some screening between the solar field and the property to the west.

KE - I believe there should be something between, because they are right up against the property line.

GJ - I know originally all of them had screening conditions, and then we went back to just going case by case, because sometimes it didn't really make sense to have screening. If it's a wide-open field, it doesn't make much sense to require trees being planted. But I think in this situation, being so close to that house, I think it kind of merits having a condition in there for screening along the house.

MP - Especially because we received a letter on it. I agree with some sort of evergreens right behind the house.

GJ - I think we have a pretty standard screening condition that we can add for the trees.

MP - Just behind the house, probably not all the way around it. I guess just by the house is what I was thinking.

GJ - Yeah, that's all I'm thinking. As long as you are all in agreement.

TM - What I have for a potential condition is: an evergreen vegetative screening between the existing home's east property line, west of the solar site and the fence would be required. And the screening will consist of a single row of evergreen trees with an initial height of 3ft and not more than 15ft between trees. So, it would be just along the east boundary of the house parcel there, between there and the fence for the solar site, and it would be just a single row, again, of evergreens, 3 feet to start with, and no more than 15 feet apart.

GJ - Sounds good to me. Outside of that, I think the new site plan looks good, kind of condensing it a little bit. Obviously, there are some trees along the west side of the new project that will stay now compared to the old one that would all get cut down.

TM - I was just going to mention, it looked like some of the concerns of the homeowner were the trees to the south. And those are going to be preserved quite a bit more with this project. Since we did add a condition, it would probably be good just to check with the applicant and see if they have any input on that as well.

GJ called applicant up to the speaker stand

MB - I think we just have one question. The landowner that sent that letter is the one to the south, right?

GJ - No.

MB - Oh, it was the one to the west? I don't know if we have a question then. I will open it up to ET to see if they do. I thought the letter was from the landowners to the south, so apologies.

ET - I don't have any questions unless you do PB. It sounds like the condition would be specific to the eastern property line of that neighbor, is that correct?

GJ - Yeah, that is correct.

ET - Okay, thank you.

Applicant left speaker stand

KE - I motion to recommend approval.

JC - I second subject to the now 16 conditions.

Motion to recommend approval with stated conditions and findings made by KE, seconded by JC, and approved unanimously.

2. **6:30 PM Public Hearing on proposed Rice County Subdivision Ordinance**

Motion by Jim Cihak, seconded by Matt Purfeerst, to recommend adoption of the Subdivision Ordinance as written with the exception of deleting Section 550.42 and modifying Section 550.43 Item A to read, "Certificate of Survey for the proposed and residual parcels."

RESULT: Approved, AYES: Garrett Johnson, Matt Purfeerst, Ken Engen, Jim Cihak, NAYS: None

Public Hearing - Rice County Subdivision Ordinance

Hearing Minutes:

Senior Planner Jeremy Edwards (JE) presented the request to the Planning Commission (PC).

MP - What is up with the 1/2-mile dead end? Where did that come from?

JE - There is always a concern that if you have a lengthy roadway and you need to back up a fire truck or other emergency vehicles down it. Admittedly, a 1/2-mile is quite a long way, but it is basically to try and prevent people from just making dead end roads into very large parcels.

JC - I have a question/thought about the survey exemption if the parcel exceeds 40 acres. I guess, initially, I talked about how I felt that any parcel split should involve a survey to get it right. And I guess I still feel that way. And because you guys are the ones that are going to deal with it after the fact, or somebody is going to deal with whatever was submitted for a property line and without a legal survey, you really don't have a clue if it's in the right place. I'm sure you've seen them in the past on larger parcels. You sure see them a lot on smaller ones, but, going forward, if you can eliminate that from being an issue down the road, I think it'd be pretty simple to add that for all parcel splits, that a survey is required. That's the way I think that part should be.

JE - After the public hearing you have an opportunity to voice your opinions and recommend any changes to the ordinance as stated. Specifically, what you are referring to JC, is section 550.42 of the proposed ordinance, striking that section would be accomplishing what you'd be proposing. But obviously, that is for all you guys to debate and decide.

CP - Public input would be available at all these steps, with plats and everything, correct?

JE - For full plats there would be an opportunity for public input at the preliminary plat stage, but not the final plat stage. And then for the minor boundary adjustment plats, there would not be an opportunity for public input.

Chair Johnson opened the public testimony portion of the item to the public and no one spoke.

Chair Johnson closed the public testimony portion of the item to the public.

Discussion:

GJ - I think this will streamline the processes. I am kind of curious about when a parcel that is larger than 40 acres goes to get split, they are just submitting an electronic version of the parcel split that still gives you a legal description and everything?

JE - So, in that scenario, they're still required to submit a legal description to us, but they wouldn't have a survey for that larger parcel. Obviously, like, let's say they had 60 acres, and they were splitting it into 40 and 20. We would have a survey for the 20 acres, but not the 40 acres, but we would have a legal description for both.

GJ - If you have to get a legal description, wouldn't you have to do a survey for it?

TM - There's a number of ways to create a legal without doing a survey, but you could run into more issues that way. It doesn't necessarily mean it's been checked on the ground ever.

JC - And there's many that have gotten recorded without a survey over the years, and you know, from time to time they aren't right.

GJ - I know we talked about it, I know we talked about it in the special meeting.

CP - I remember that.

GJ - I don't remember the way we left it, did everyone else feel the same way?

CP - I think we were looking into farm splits, like if you had 160 acres, and you were going to split into two 80-acre parcels without having a survey done, that's where that came up. We were trying to get away from having a survey on everything during our meetings. I don't know if we ever had a consensus on it, but we talked both ways on it. And to JC's point, I see that anything under 40 would have to have a survey. So, 60 acres to 20 acres would have a survey on it. It's hard to say.

GJ - I don't feel real strongly one way or the other, I can see it both ways. I mean if it helps keep things straight, I understand that, but in the same breath I guess it's kind of forcing a bigger expense on something that somebody wasn't expecting to be expensive.

CP - I guess with my experience when buying properties, I just have a survey done. Especially when lawyers get involved it is suggested, and that with bare ground properties.

JC - And there are more financial institutions requiring them also. I just feel that requiring them on all splits would just save issues going down the road. I just feel, I think it would be well worth it. And surveys can get expensive, but typically not so much in what we're dealing with here.

MP - Yeah, I think at the board meeting, I was actually the one proposing 40 acres, but at this point, I

don't know if I really have a strong opinion. Maybe I did that day, I don't remember, but I don't know if I really have a strong opinion one way or the other. I can totally see JC's point. I'm just thinking splits don't happen all that much on farm ground anyways, unless you're selling it, but I'd be fine if we want to do everything. At the end of the day, this is going on to the Board of Commissioners, but this is the only public hearing for it. I'd be fine with just removing the 40 acres.

KE - I really don't have an opinion on it one way or the other, I can see it both ways.

MP - Especially when you buy a property, I agree with you, CP, you definitely want a survey.

KE - I think you would do that normally. If I were going to buy, I'd want to know exactly where my boundaries are.

MP - The amount of people that would be affected by that 40-acre exception would be pretty small to begin with and there are ways they can figure it out. How does this work? If we want to remove it, do we have to make a motion?

TM - It would be part of the motion, so you'd be making a motion to recommend the language to the board, and then if there's a change to it, we can point out those two spots for that change. So, addressing that, if you want to go forward with that change, we can point out where those sections are. And then approve it that way or whichever way you want to go.

JE - So I've pulled it up on the screen, that particular part of the ordinance, there's two pieces. One is that 550.42 exemption, that would be in the event that a split resulted in all parcels that are 40 acres. So, say you had 80, you split it into two 40s, so this would be a situation where all of the parcels involved are 40 acres or more. That's that exemption. If you didn't want to proceed with that, you would strike that section. And then the other one is in 550.43, letter A, where a Certificate of Survey of the proposed and residual parcels is a requirement for submittal, and then you would remove the second part of that sentence that exempts the survey for the remainder that's 40 acres or more in size. So, there's two different parts there. One's the situation where one of the parcels is less than 40 acres, and the other one's larger than 40 acres, and then the other is Section 550.42 where all the parcels are larger than 40 acres. So, if that's something that you wanted to recommend striking those portions, it is certainly your prerogative or you can leave them in. I'm sure the County Board would appreciate your recommendation one way or the other.

CP - I think you should recommend or vote on which way you want to recommend it for the County Board. Otherwise, I think this simplifies the process for staff especially, to do a lot of stuff in-house instead of taking 3 months in a lot of cases for this stuff. I think the whole thing is basically good.

GJ - I assume we will make a motion to approve everything, but I think we probably want to have a consensus on what we want to do for the survey first, because it's all going to be part of the same motion. Might be easier if we are all in consensus one way or the other to make a decision on it.

JC - You might find this hard to believe, but I'm ready to make a motion, but we need to be done with discussion first.

MP - I'm in consensus with it. I'm fine with it.

JC - I motion to recommend approval of the ordinance before us with changes to Section 550.42 Exemption & 550.43A following the comma.

MP - I will second.

Motion to recommend approval with stated conditions and findings made by JC, seconded by MP, and approved unanimously.

III. Adjournment

Hearing no other items before the PC, a motion was made by JC, second by KE, to adjourn the meeting at 6:54 pm. Motion carried 4-0.

Respectfully Submitted

Planning Commission



MacKenzie Klett
Office Support Specialist



Garrett Johnson, Chair