

Memorandum

To: City Planning Commission

From: Aeric Ripley

Re: November 6, 2023 Regular Meeting

Date: November 4, 2023

The Regular Meeting of the Alma Planning Commission will be held **November 6, 2023 at 6:00 P.M. Alma Municipal Building 525 E Superior Street, Alma, MI 48801.**

Agenda

1. Call to Order – Roll Call
2. Pledge of Allegiance
3. Minutes of the Planning Commission Meeting held on [October 2, 2023](#).
4. **Master Planning Upcoming**
 - a. [Notice of Intent to Prepare a Master Plan](#)
 - b. Master Planning Survey: <https://bit.ly/GratiotMP>
 - c. Planning Commission SWOT analysis, Thursday, December 7th from 5:30-7:30 pm at the Ithaca GIRESD.
 - d. First Public Input Session on Wednesday, January 17th from 5:30-7:30 pm at the Ithaca GIRESD.
5. [Draft Solor Ordinance](#)
6. Other Business
7. Invitation to Public
8. Adjourn

**City of Alma
Planning Commission Minutes
October 2, 2023**

Planning Commission Secretary Jessica Gilkins called a regular meeting of the Alma Planning Commission to order at 6:00 p.m. at the Alma Municipal Building. A quorum of the Planning Commission was present.

Present: Justin Fonley, Jessica Gilkins, Sonia Gibson, David Justin, Greg Mapes, and Michelle Pitts.
Absent: Ellen Richter and Heather Therrien.

Approval of Minutes

Motion by Justin, seconded by Mapes, to approve minutes of the September 11, 2023, regular meeting. Motion carried.

**Yes: Fonley, Gilkins, Gibson, Justin, Mapes, and Pitts.
No: none.
Absent: Richter and Therrien.**

Public Hearing

Secretary Gilkins provided the following information: A request has been received from Superior Street Holdings LLC to conditionally re-zone a parcel of land located at 721 E. Superior Street, from the current zone, B2, General Business District, to LI, Limited Industrial, to allow use of the current structure for manufacture of fabricated metal products, which is allowed in Limited Industrial zoning districts, and will be outlined by special conditions set within a conditional rezoning agreement.

Motion by Mapes, seconded by Justin, to open a public hearing at 6:02 p.m. to receive comments on the proposed conditional rezoning of 721 E. Superior Street from B2 to LI. Motion carried.

**Yes: Fonley, Gilkins, Gibson, Justin, Mapes, and Pitts.
No: none.
Absent: Richter and Therrien.**

City Manager Aeric Ripley provided a brief background on the request, saying that the property owner's request for re-zoning that would allow in a business that has specific needs for electric service support and has been unable to find another building with sufficient service. He asked members to consider the draft conditional agreement and noted modifications could be made prior to approval.

Jim Wheeler, Greater Gratiot Development Inc., explained that SAIA Manufacturing has been searching for a building with appropriate electrical service to support equipment for a certain type of metal fabrication. Their location on Warner Road cannot feasibly support this equipment, and the location they had been using, in Ithaca, is no longer available. Wheeler said they have been helping with the search and found the building at 721 E. Superior to be sufficient for the equipment, but it is currently zoned B2. He said the processing will take place inside the building and will include receiving metal deliveries and shipping out the fabricated pieces. He spoke in favor of the conditional rezoning and added they are hopeful that the business will grow, and they will eventually be able to find or build a larger building that will support all of their operations in one of the area industrial parks.

Planning Commission Member Mapes suggested the conditions in the proposed conditional rezoning agreement could be modified as some of them would be governed by ordinance. Discussion followed regarding noise, emissions, deliveries, and on-site storage. Commission members agreed to reduce the proposed conditions to one which would restrict sound, emissions, and outside storage.

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Ripley said notice of the public hearing for proposed conditional re-zoning had been sent to neighboring property owners and published. No comments or concerns were received from property owners or members of the public.

Motion by Mapes, seconded by Justin, to close the public hearing regarding conditional rezoning of 721 E. Superior at 6:17 p.m. Motion carried.

**Yes: Fonley, Gilkins, Gibson, Justin, Mapes, and Pitts.
No: none.
Absent: Richter and Therrien.**

Motion by Mapes, seconded by Justin, to recommend approval to the City Commission of the application for conditional re-zoning of 721 E. Superior from Zone B2, General Business District, to LI, Limited Industrial District, together with the related conditional rezoning agreement with modifications as discussed. Motion carried.

**Yes: Fonley, Gilkins, Gibson, Justin, Mapes, and Pitts.
No: none.
Absent: Richter and Therrien.**

Other Business

No business was put forward.

Invitation to Public

Kasey Zehner, Greater Gratiot Development Inc., spoke briefly regarding the Master Planning Steering Committee and upcoming meetings. She noted January 17, 2024, would be the first meeting for public input.

Adjourn

Motion by Justin, seconded by Pitts, to adjourn the meeting at 6:19 p.m. Motion carried.

**Yes: Fonley, Gilkins, Gibson, Justin, Mapes, and Pitts.
No: none.
Absent: Richter and Therrien.**

Sara Anderson, Alma City Clerk

Date of Approval

Notice of Intent to Prepare a Master Plan

To: Neighboring jurisdictions' planning commissions; Gratiot County Planning Commission; East Michigan Council of Governments; public utility companies; railroad companies; public transportation agencies; school boards; downtown development authorities; Gratiot County Road Commission; Michigan Department of Transportation; or other entities with an interest in Gratiot County.

From: Kasey Zehner, Greater Gratiot Development, Inc., Administrator of the Gratiot Countywide Master Plan Steering Committee, encompassing the Planning Commissions of:

Gratiot County	Village of Ashley	Bethany Township	Lafayette Township	Pine River Township
	Village of Breckenridge	Elba Township	Newark Township	Seville Township
City of Alma	Village of Perrinton	Emerson Township	New Haven Township	Sumner Township
City of Ithaca		Fulton Township	North Shade Township	Washington Township
City of St. Louis	Arcada Township	Hamilton Township	North Star Township	Wheeler Township

Date: October 24, 2023

This notice is to inform you that the Gratiot Countywide Master Plan Steering Committee (on behalf of the respective Planning Commissions of the County of Gratiot, cities of Alma, Ithaca, and St. Louis, villages of Ashley, Breckenridge, and Perrinton, and townships of Arcada, Bethany, Elba, Emerson, Fulton, Hamilton, Lafayette, Newark, New Haven, North Shade, North Star, Pine River, Seville, Sumner, Washington, and Wheeler) is working to adopt a new version of the Gratiot Countywide Master Plan as its master plan.

In accordance with Section 39 of the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, Public Act 33 of 2008, MCL 125.3839, this notice is to inform our neighboring local governments, planning entities, and any public utilities and railroad companies of the above municipal units' intent to adopt the new Countywide Master Plan. The Gratiot Countywide Master Plan Steering Committee welcomes your cooperation and comments on the proposed plan.

On behalf of the planning commissions of the above municipal units, Greater Gratiot Development, Inc. will send you a copy of the Countywide Master Plan as soon as we have completed the draft for review or you will receive a copy from Greater Gratiot Development, Inc. for comment. Such copy will be provided by electronic copy (e.g., .PDF) unless you provide objections and would like a physical copy of the document.

The proposed plan will also be posted and available free of charge on: <https://www.gogrowgratiot.org/>.

Any comments you submit may be sent in digital format to info@gratiot.org or in writing to 136 S. Main St., Ithaca, MI 48847.

Under MCL 125.3841(2)(f), each public utility company and railroad company owning or operating a public utility or railroad within the local unit of government, and any government entity that registers its name and address for this purpose with the secretary of the planning commission, shall reimburse the Gratiot Countywide Steering Committee for any copying and postage costs incurred in receiving a hard copy of the Countywide Master Plan or final Countywide Master Plan to be adopted.

WE WANT

YOUR

INPUT

Gratiot Countywide Master Plan Public Input Survey

Let us know what your priorities, goals, and ideas are for the next five years in Gratiot County and its municipalities. This survey can be done online in ten minutes! Survey closes on **Friday, December 8.**

**All participants are entered into a raffle for five \$50
Gratiot Area Chamber Gift Certificates!**

Scan this QR code:



OR visit:
bit.ly/GratiotMP



The Gratiot Countywide Master Plan is administered by Greater Gratiot Development, Inc.

Questions? Contact (989)
875-2083 or info@gratiot.org

DRAFT SOLAR ENERGY ORDINANCE

1. Solar Energy Systems, General Regulations

- a.** Any Small Solar Energy System mounted on the ground shall comply with those requirements applicable to an accessory building, or those requirements applicable to an accessory building within the zoning district in which the Solar Energy System is located, whichever are more stringent.
- b.** A site plan shall be prepared and submitted to the Zoning Administrator for approval prior to commencing installation. The site plan shall include the proposed location and an elevation drawing showing the proposed height and foundation details.
- c.** Small Solar Energy Systems shall not be constructed or installed in the front yard of any lot.
- d.** Any Small Solar Energy System erected on a building shall not extend beyond the peak of the roof, provided that a Small Solar Energy System erected on a flat roof shall otherwise comply with the other requirements of this Section. In no event shall any portion of a Solar Energy System extend beyond the lesser of either thirty (30) feet or the maximum building height permitted within the district in which that Solar Energy System is located.
- e.** No Solar Energy System shall be installed in such a way as to pose an Unreasonable Safety Hazard.
- f.** All Solar Energy Systems must conform to all applicable federal, state and county requirements, in addition to other applicable Township Ordinances, as well as any applicable industry standards.
- g.** All Solar Energy Systems must be installed in a manner ensuring that concentrated solar glare shall not be directed onto nearby properties or roadways.
- h.** Any Small Solar Energy System mounted on the ground shall be sufficiently screened from the view of adjacent properties or roadways through the use of solid fencing consistent, or the installation of a wall, hedge, or other vegetation not less than four (4) feet. This shall not contradict with other fencing and screening sections of this ordinance.
- i.** All power transmission lines from a ground-mounted Solar Energy System to any building or other structure shall be located underground. The Planning Commission may waive this requirement, or may limit it through conditions, if it determines that it would be impractical or unreasonably expensive to install, place or maintain such transmission lines underground.
- j.** Any Solar Energy System and the surrounding premises must be kept and maintained in good repair and condition at all times and must continuously conform with all applicable building and electrical codes. This shall include, but is not

limited to, ensuring that any fencing is maintained to provide sufficient protection and screening, that the property is kept clear of trash and other debris, that all aspects of the Solar Energy System are maintained according to industry standards, and that no portion of the Solar Energy System is in a blighted, unsafe, or substandard manner.

- k. An Abandoned Solar Energy System shall be removed by the property owner within six (6) months.

2. Large Solar Energy Systems

- a. **Purpose and Intent:** The purpose and intent of this Subsection is to establish standards for the setting, installation, operation, repair, decommissioning and removal of Large Solar Energy Systems as a special use.
- b. **Site Plan Drawing and Supporting Materials:** All applications for a Large Solar Energy System must be accompanied by detailed site plans, drawn to scale and dimensioned and certified by a registered engineer licensed in the State of Michigan, displaying the following information, in addition to the information required by Article 11:
 - i. A site plan.
 - ii. All lot lines and dimensions, including a legal description of each lot or parcel comprising the Large Solar Energy System.
 - iii. Names of owners of each lot or parcel within the Township that is proposed to be within the Large Solar Energy System.
 - iv. Vicinity map showing the location of all surrounding land uses.
 - v. Location and height of all proposed Solar Array(s), buildings, structures, electrical tie lines and transmission lines, security fencing, and all above-ground structures and utilities associated with the Large Solar Energy System.
 - vi. Horizontal and vertical (elevation) scale drawings with dimensions that show the location of the proposed Solar Array(s), buildings, structures, electrical tie lines and transmission lines, security fencing and all above ground structures and utilities on the property.
 - vii. Location of all existing and proposed overhead and underground electrical transmission or distribution lines within the Large Solar Energy System and within one thousand (1,000) feet of the outside perimeter of the Large Solar Energy System.
 - viii. Proposed setbacks from the Solar Array(s) to all boundary lines and all existing and proposed structures within the Large Solar Energy System.

- ix.** Land elevations for the Solar Array(s) location and the relationship to the land elevations of all existing and proposed structures within the Large Solar Energy System.
- x.** Access driveways within and to the Large Solar Energy System, together with a detailed narrative regarding dimensions, composition, and maintenance of each proposed driveway. All access drives shall be subject to Gratiot County Road Commission or Michigan Department of Transportation approval as appropriate, and shall be planned so as to minimize the use of lands for that purpose.
- xi.** Planned security measures to prevent unauthorized trespass and access and to warn of potential dangers during the construction, operation, removal, maintenance, or repair of the Large Solar Energy System.
- xii.** A written description of the maintenance program to be used for the Solar Array(s) and other components of the Large Solar Energy System, including decommissioning and removal procedures when determined by the Township to be obsolete, uneconomic or an Abandoned Solar Energy System. The description shall include maintenance schedules, types of maintenance to be performed, and decommissioning and removal procedures and schedules if the Large Solar Energy System becomes obsolete, uneconomical or an Abandoned Solar Energy System.
- xiii.** A copy of the manufacturer's safety measures.
- xiv.** Planned lighting protection measures.
- xv.** The environmental impact of the Large Solar Energy System, as reflected in an environmental impact study, including, but not limited to, a review of the following factors:
 - a)** Impact on area water resources;
 - b)** Impact on air quality;
 - c)** Noise impacts caused by the Solar Energy System;
 - d)** Impact on utilities and infrastructure;
 - e)** Protection of neighboring property owners and children;
 - f)** Impact on wildlife;
 - g)** Effects on floodplains and wetlands;
 - h)** Unique farmlands or soils;
 - i)** Areas of aesthetic or historical importance;
 - j)** Archeological or cultural concerns; and

- h. Lot Coverage:** A Large Solar Energy System is exempt from maximum lot coverage limitations.
- i. Screening/Security:** A Large Solar Energy System shall be completely enclosed by perimeter security fencing to restrict unauthorized access. Such fencing shall be 8 feet in height as measured from the natural grade of the fencing perimeter. Electric fencing is not permitted. The perimeter of Large Solar Energy Systems shall also be screened and buffered by buffer areas whenever existing natural forest vegetation does not otherwise continuously obscure the Large Solar Energy System's entire perimeter from adjacent parcels, subject to the following requirements:

 - i.** Unless screened and buffered at all times by natural forest vegetation meeting the minimum spacing and height requirements, and having a substantially similar obscuring effect of an evergreen vegetative buffer installed pursuant to this Section, a continuous evergreen vegetative buffer shall be installed and maintained at all times at the perimeter of all Large Solar Energy Systems, including without limitation between such Large Solar Energy Systems and adjacent residential or agricultural areas and/or public highways or streets. Nothing contained herein shall be construed to prevent reasonable access to any Large Solar Energy System as approved by the special use permit.
 - ii.** The evergreen or native vegetative buffer shall be composed of native or evergreen trees that at the time of planting shall be a minimum of four (4) feet in height, with shrubs being at least two (2) feet in height. The evergreen trees shall be spaced no more than fifteen (15) feet apart on center (from the central trunk of one plant to the central trunk of the next plant), native trees shall be placed no more than thirty (30) feet apart on center and shrubs shall be spaced no more than even (7) feet apart on center. All unhealthy (60 percent dead or greater) and dead material shall be replaced by the applicant within six (6) months, or the next appropriate planting period, whichever occurs first, but under no circumstances should the applicant allow unhealthy or dead material to remain in place for more than six (6) consecutive months. Failure to maintain the required evergreen vegetative buffer required by this section shall constitute a violation of this Ordinance and sufficient grounds for revocation of any special use permit previously granted.
 - iii.** All plant materials shall be installed between March 15 and November 15. If the applicant requests a final certificate of occupancy from the City of Alma and the applicant is unable to plant during the installation period, the applicant will provide the City of Alma with a letter of credit, surety or guarantee for an amount equal to one and one half (1.5) times the cost of any planting deficiencies, and the City of Alma shall hold that security. After all plantings have occurred, the City of Alma shall return the financial guarantee.

- j. Signage:** No lettering, company insignia, advertising, graphics or other commercially oriented inscriptions or designs shall be on any part of the Solar Arrays or other components of the Large Solar Energy System. This section does not prohibit signs reasonably necessary to inform the public of potential safety hazards associated with the Large Solar Energy System, nor does it prohibit any other signs that may be required by this Ordinance, the special use permit or other applicable law.
- k. Noise:** No component of any Large Solar Energy System shall emit noise exceeding fifty (50) dBA averaged over a one (1) hour period as measured at the outside perimeter of the project.
- l. Lighting:** All lighting for parking lots, driveways, external illumination of buildings, or the illumination of signs shall be directed away from and be shielded from adjacent properties and shall be arranged so as to not adversely affect driver visibility on adjacent public roads.
- m. Glare:** All solar panels shall be placed such that concentrated solar glare shall not be directed onto nearby properties or roadways.
- n. Distribution, Transmission and Interconnection:** All collection lines and interconnections from the Solar Array(s) to any electrical substations shall be located and maintained underground inside the Large Solar Energy System. The Planning Commission may waive this requirement, or modify it with appropriate conditions, if it determines that it would be impractical or unreasonably expensive to install, place or maintain such collection lines and interconnections underground.
- o. Abandonment and Decommissioning:** Following the operational life of the project, or at the time the project becomes obsolete, uneconomic or an Abandoned Solar Energy System, as determined by the Public Services Director or any other expert or specialist to be designated by the City of Alma to make such a determination, the applicant shall perform decommissioning and removal of the Large Solar Energy System and all its components. The applicant shall prepare a decommissioning plan and submit it to the Planning Commission for review prior to issuance of the special use permit. Under this plan, all structures and facilities shall be removed, including any structures below-grade, and removed offsite for disposal. No concrete, piping and other materials may be left in place. Any Solar Array or combination of Photovoltaic Devices that become an Abandoned Solar Energy System shall be removed under the decommissioning plan. The ground must be restored to its original condition within one hundred eighty (180) days of becoming an Abandoned Solar Energy System, or decommissioning, whichever occurs first.
- p. General Standards:** The Planning Commission may not approve any Large Solar Energy System special use permit unless it finds that all of the applicable standards for special use permit contained in this Ordinance are met.
- q. Safety:** The Planning Commission shall not approve any Large Solar Energy System special use permit if it finds the Large Solar Energy System will pose an

Unreasonable Safety Hazard to the occupants of any surrounding properties or area wildlife.

- r. **Conditions and Modifications:** Any conditions and modifications approved by the Planning Commission shall be recorded in the Planning Commission's meeting minutes. The Planning Commission may, in addition to other reasonable conditions, require landscaping, walls, fences and other improvements that are reasonable in relation to and consistent with the nature of the applicable or adjacent zoning districts. After approval, at least two (2) copies of the final approved Site Plan shall be signed and dated by the Planning Commission Chair and authorized representative of the applicant. One copy shall be kept on file by the City of Alma Clerk, and one copy shall be returned to the applicant's authorized representative.
- s. **Inspection:** The City of Alma shall have the right at any reasonable time to inspect the premises on which any Large Solar Energy System is located. The City of Alma may hire one or more consultants to assist with any such inspections, at the applicant's or project owner's expense.
- t. **Maintenance and Repair:** Each Large Solar Energy System must be kept and maintained in good repair and condition at all times. If the City of Alma Zoning Administrator determines that a Large Solar Energy System fails at any time to meet the requirements of this Ordinance or the special use permit, or that it poses a potential Unreasonable Safety Hazard, the applicant, its successors or assigns; the current owner; or current operator shall shut down the Large Solar Energy System within 48 hours after notice by the Zoning Administrator and not operate, start or restart the Large Solar Energy System until the condition has been corrected. The applicant, its successors or assigns; the current owner; or current operator shall keep a maintenance log on the Solar Array(s), which shall be available for the City of Alma's review on a monthly basis. Applicant, its successors or assigns; the current owner; or current operator shall keep all sites within the Large Solar Energy System neat, clean and free of refuse, waste or unsightly, hazardous or unsanitary conditions.
- u. **Roads:** Any material damages to a public road located within the City of Alma resulting from the construction, maintenance or operation of a Large Solar Energy System shall be repaired at the applicant's expense. In addition, the applicant shall submit to either the Gratiot County Road Commission or MDOT (as appropriate) a description of the routes to be used by construction and delivery vehicles; any road improvements that will be necessary to accommodate construction vehicles, equipment or other deliveries; and a performance guarantee acceptable to the appropriate agency in an amount necessary to assure repair of any damage to the public roads caused by construction of the Large Solar Energy System or any of its elements.
- v. **Continuing Security and Escrow:** If any Large Solar Energy System is approved for construction under this Section, applicant shall be required to post continuing security and a continuing escrow deposit prior to commencement of construction, which shall remain in effect until the Large Solar Energy System has been finally removed, as provided below:

- i. Continuing Restoration Security:** If a special use permit is approved pursuant to this section, the Planning Commission shall require security in the form of a cash deposit, letter of credit, or surety bond acceptable to the City of Alma, which will be furnished by the applicant to the City of Alma in order to ensure full compliance with this section and all conditions of approval. When determining the amount of each required security, the City of Alma may also require an annual escalator or increase based on the Consumer Price Index (or its equivalent or successor). Such financial guarantee shall be deposited or filed with the City of Alma Treasurer after a special use permit has been approved but before construction commences on the Large Solar Energy System. At a minimum, the financial security shall be in an amount determined by the City of Alma to be reasonably sufficient to restore the property to its previous condition prior to construction and operation of the Large Solar Energy System. Such financial security shall be kept in full force and effect during the entire time that the Large Solar Energy System exists or is in place, and such financial security shall be irrevocable and non-cancelable. In addition, the party operating a Large Solar Energy System approved by the City of Alma shall inform the City of Alma in the event that System, or a material portion of that system is sold to a third party, and any such sale shall require the purchasing party to provide the City of Alma with the security described by this section, along with relevant contact information.
- ii. Continuing Compliance and Enforcement Escrow Deposit:** A continuing escrow deposit shall be held by the City of Alma and shall be funded by a cash deposit, letter of credit, or surety bond by the applicant prior to the commencement of construction of any Large Solar Energy System and shall be maintained by the owner or operator until the Large Solar Energy System has been permanently decommissioned and removed. The monetary amount placed by the applicant in escrow with the Township shall be estimated by the Township to cover all reasonable costs and expenses associated with continuing enforcement of this Ordinance and the terms of the special use permit, which costs can include, but are not limited to, reasonable fees for the City of Alma Attorney, City of Alma Planner and City of Alma Engineer, as well as costs for any reports or studies that the City of Alma determines are reasonably related to enforcement of the Ordinance and the special use permit. If the City of Alma is required to expend any portion of the escrow deposit or if the existing escrow amount paid by the applicant proves to be insufficient to cover the City of Alma's enforcement costs, the City of Alma may require the applicant to place additional monies into escrow with the City of Alma.
- iii. Continuing Obligations:** Failure to keep any required financial security and escrow deposit in full force and effect at all times while a Large Solar Energy System exists or is in place shall constitute a material and significant violation of the special use permit and this Ordinance, and will subject the Large Solar Energy System applicant, owner and operator to all remedies available to the City of Alma, including enforcement action and revocation of the special use permit. A review of security and escrow requirements shall occur no less than annually to determine compliance with this section.

- w. Conditions:** In addition to the requirements of this Section, the Planning Commission may impose additional reasonable conditions on the approval of a Large Solar Energy System as a special use.
- x. Completion of Construction:** The construction of any Large Solar Energy System must commence within a period of one (1) year from the date a special use permit is granted and must be completed within a period of three (3) consecutive years from the date a special use permit is granted. The Planning Commission may grant an extension not to exceed one (1) year, provided the applicant requests the extension prior to the date of the expiration of the special land use approval. Failure to complete construction within the permitted time period shall result in the approved special use permit being rendered null and void.
- y. Transfer of Ownership/Operation:** Prior to a change in the ownership or operation a Large Solar Energy System, including, but not limited to, by the sale or lease of that System or the underlying property, the current owner or operator shall provide written notice to the City of Alma at least sixty (60) days prior to that change becoming effective. This notice shall inform the City of Alma of the intended transfer of control of the Large Solar Energy System and shall include a copy of the instrument or agreement affecting that transfer. Such an instrument or agreement shall include an express statement that the new owner or operator of the Large Solar Energy System shall not be permitted to operate that System until compliance with the terms of this Ordinance, including requirements for continuing security and escrow funds, has been established.