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CHEROKEE CO. LANDOWNERS PUSH FOR SOLAR ORDINANCE CHANGES

Zoning commission eases on acre cap, hangs on to setback

SUPERVISORS YET TO APPROVE ORDINANCE

BY MADELINE COMBS

Cherokee County landowner Niels Lundsgaard looks forward to the prospect of a utility scale solar farm on his land, saying that the proposed Maple River Solar project by TED Renewables has brought his family together.

His hope, in turn, is that the county zoning commission will consider a solar ordinance that reflects the rights and liberties of landowners like himself for future solar projects.

Lundsgaard was one of many property owners present at Monday's zoning commission meeting where commissioners reviewed the ordinance draft much like they did last week.

But the influx of public opinion is what appeared to set the two discussions apart.

Coming off of their April 21 meeting, the commission had an ordinance that outlined stringent guidelines for utility scale solar projects. The 500 acre cap and quarter-mile setback they had settled on meant the possibility of projects like TED Renewables' was dwindling.

On Monday, landowners and project developers with the Maple River project urged the commission to reconsider the acre cap and setback, specifically, given the ramifications those limiting parameters could have on future solar developments.

The \$150 million Maple

River Solar Project would occupy nearly 900 acres of county land and provide power for nearly 30,000 homes both locally and statewide. It would also generate hundreds of thousands of dollars in tax revenue for the county annually.

Lundsgaard, who is leasing his land to TED Renewables for the Maple River project, stood firmly on the fact that his family is well established in the community and the project was something they are very willing and interested to participate in.

"We're not coming in as some fly-by-night operation or anything that isn't well established in the community,"

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Cherokee County landowner Niels Lundsgaard stood up during Monday's zoning commission meeting to show the commissioners that the visual "nuisance" of a wind turbine is different than that of a solar farm, thus requiring different setbacks. The commissioners are pushing to finalize an ordinance that would require a 1,320 foot setback from residences that are not involved in a project. CHRONICLE TIMES photo by MADELINE COMBS

CCUSO expansion slated to be ready by fall



The Voldeng building, located on the south side of the MHI/CCUSO campus, is being renovated to expand the CCUSO facility and accommodate the over-census population currently housed in the facility. The building previously housed juveniles before MHI stopped admitting juveniles back in 2023. CHRONICLE TIMES photo by MADELINE COMBS

Renovation of Voldeng building will provide 50 additional beds for over-census unit

BY MADELINE COMBS

Renovations to the state's Civil Commitment Unit for Sexual Offenders in Cherokee are scheduled to be completed by this fall.

During their quarterly citizens advisory meeting last Wednesday, administrators at the Cherokee Mental Health Institute described the current status of the

project that has been in the works since 2022.

In February of last year, CCUSO began accepting bids for an expansion of their unit to house those in the TRP. The project involved renovating the Voldeng building, which was originally built on the south side of the campus in 1904 as a farm cottage and could accommodate

up to 150 men.

Initial estimates for the project in 2024 reached just over \$2 million to complete the project.

The renovations will give CCUSO up to 51 additional beds for the Transitional Release Program and create more overall space for the unit that has faced crowding

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JURY DEEMS JOSIE SMITH A SEXUALLY VIOLENT PREDATOR

Transgender woman sentenced to CCUSO

AG SILENT OVER SMITH CIVIL COMMITMENT

BY ALLISON MOORE

A Buena Vista County jury agreed to commit Josie Smith to the Cherokee Civil Commitment Unit for Sex Offenders, fulfilling a campaign promise from Attorney General Brenna Bird who has since remained silent on the verdict.

After three days in court and less than an hour of deliberation, the jury of eight county residents deemed Josie Smith, 28, a sexually violent predator under Iowa law.

District Court Judge Shayne Mayer sent the jury to reach a verdict around 4:30 p.m. Thursday, April 24.

They returned the verdict less than an hour later, ac-

cording to the civil filing signed by jury foreperson Eric Wiese.

The state filed a civil commitment petition against Smith in December 2023. The year prior, Attorney General Bird pledged to "lock up" Smith while campaigning against former AG Tom Miller. Bird then claimed that by dismissing an earlier civil commitment case he filed against Smith, Miller allowed a dangerous child predator to "go free." A spokesperson for Miller's office later acknowledged Smith's gender reassignment treatment influenced the dismissal.

Multiple representatives at Bird's office either declined comment or didn't respond to requests for comment on the

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Bousselot sets sights on Auditor Rob Sand

Former Summit lobbyist explores governor campaign

On the heels of Gov. Kim Reynolds announcing that she doesn't intend to run for another term, State Sen. Mike Bousselot is exploring a run for governor.

The Ankeny Republican has defeating Rob Sand as his top priority.

"I think it's critically important that the next Republican candidate for governor be somebody who has the ability to win and beat Rob Sand," Bousselot said during an interview with the Cherokee Chronicle Times last week on the heels of his exploratory campaign.

He thinks the incumbent state auditor — the only Democrat who holds an elected office in Iowa — "wants government to be bigger and more in our lives than ever before."

Sand hasn't announced a gubernatorial bid. But he's considered the leading Democrat to mount such a bid. The Des Moines Register reported he raised more than \$8 million last year. He has \$7.5 million in cash on hand, according to fil-

ings with the Iowa Ethics & Campaign Disclosure Board.

"Rob Sand wants to undo all of the progress we have made," said Bousselot of the specter of Sand running for governor.

He said Reynolds has done a "great job" as governor, noting that "she's lowered taxes, brought tremendous economic success to the entire state, invested in our families, made our communities safer, responded to Covid in a way that nobody could have anticipated, and prioritized the freedoms of Iowans."

As for Sand, he said "he has already proposed raising the sales tax, undoing the tax cuts that have been passed for families and for small business."

Sand declined comment for this story.

Bousselot asserted it's an open secret that Sand is running for governor. He says he's the candidate best prepared to take him on.

"(Sand) has billionaires in his pocket," Bousselot said. "This fight in this next election is going to be about everyday Iowans and small business owners, not billionaires."

Bousselot touts himself the owner of two businesses with strong connections with the last two Republican governors. Bousselot was once Terry Branstad's chief of staff. He was also director of the Iowa Department of Management under Reynolds.

Former Gov. Terry Branstad is said to have encouraged the first-term senator to mount a

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2025 TOMAHAWK ROYALTY

Congratulations to 2025 King Wyatt Johnson and Queen Lydia Hart as they were crowned Friday. The Tomahawk Relays were scheduled for Monday and Tuesday, April 28-29.

Cherokee man charged with vehicular homicide for Hwy. 3 crash

ORTEGA 'DRIVING RECKLESSLY' DURING BLIZZARD, SHERIFF ALLEGES

BY TOM CULLEN

A Cherokee man was arrested and charged vehicular homicide in connection with a fatal collision near the Buena Vista-Cherokee line.

Jorge Ortega, 28, was booked into Buena Vista County Jail last Wednesday on a felony vehicular homicide charge. Ortega was involved in a fatal accident with Roseannabelle Bumsted, 65, of Nemaha, in the 100 mile of Highway 3 March 19. A blizzard was bludgeoning northern Buena Vista County at around 6:25 a.m., the time of the collision.

An affidavit filed by the Buena Vista County Sheriff alleged Ortega was driving recklessly at around 6:25 a.m. near Aurelia. He allegedly passed a no-passing sign and continued into the opposite lane of traffic for around a mile after the intersection of Highway 3 and M27. Ortega's 2020 Honda Accord collided head-on with Bumsted's 2012 Ford Escape, according to the affidavit. Ortega was hospitalized in Sioux Falls, S.D. Bumsted was transported to Buena Vista Regional Medical Center, where she died from her injuries.

A video obtained by the sheriff shows Ortega allegedly failed to maintain lanes, he allegedly crossed the center line and the fog line and he drove in the opposite lane of traffic.

Ortega remains held on a \$20,000 bond. A preliminary hearing in magistrate court was scheduled for April 30.