

**Town of Elmira, New York
Planning Board
Meeting – June 2, 2025
MINUTES**

PRESENT: Chairman Mark Miles
Members: Ron McConnell
Paul DiPietro
Mike Kohberger

ABSENT: Nick Kapnolas
Robert Knapp
William Maloney

ALSO PRESENT: Eric Crandall, Code Enforcement Officer,
Scott Moore, Town of Elmira Attorney

Chairman Miles opens the meeting at 7:08 pm and welcomes everyone. He notes that Nick Kapnolas, Robert Knapp, and William Maloney are not present and excuses their absence.

Chairman Miles asked members if they had read the minutes from the April 1, 2025 planning board meeting and if anyone had additions or corrections, and hearing none, a motion to approve.

MOTION by Paul DiPietro to accept the minutes as written.
Second by Mike Kohberger

Ayes: Miles, McConnell, DiPietro, and Kohberger

Nays: None

AGENDA ITEM – Site Plan Review for Bhakti Marga America

Chairman Miles invites the applicant's representative, Lawrence Hoetzlein, to discuss the application. Mr. Hoetzlein explains that they are seeking preliminary site plan approval for the Bhakti Marga Campus, which includes 1100 W. Church St (98.08-4-70 & 98.08-3-19), 301 Demarest Parkway (98.08-4-71.1) and 304 Demarest Parkway (98.08-4-24).

Mr. Hoetzlein states that they will be converting the old gymnasium into an auditorium, adding a kitchen and cafeteria, converting the old classrooms into guest rooms, and constructing a building addition at the back of the gym/auditorium to serve as a media room.

Chairman Miles asks about the number of parking spaces. Mr. Hoetzlein says that they will create additional parking to the north of the former school building and expand the parking lot at the Ashram. He does say that although the current plans do not reflect it, the new parking lot will instead be a grass lot instead of impervious material. The reasoning is that the new parking lot will only be used during large events which typically only occur once per

year, but it will also alleviate any potential stormwater impacts. The total number of parking spaces being proposed, between the existing and the new and expanded lots, totals 172 spaces.

Mr. Hoetzlein then goes on to describe the proposed second-story addition to the east side of the former school building, which would be utilized to double the amount of guest rooms. Mr. DiPietro asks how long people will be staying in the guest rooms. It is stated that generally they will only be there for a few days at a time but may be up to week or so if they are on a spiritual retreat. However, under no circumstances will it be longer than thirty days.

Mr. DiPietro asks about the submitted site plan and whether it depicts the existing or proposed landscaping details. Mr. Hoetzlein says it is a combination of existing and proposed vegetation. Mr. DiPietro recommends a full landscaping plan be submitted which would detail the plantings. Mr. Hoetzlein agrees, but asks if that would be required prior to acceptance as a preliminary site plan. The consensus among the board is that the landscaping plan would not be required to accept the plan as the preliminary site plan but would be required prior to final site plan approval.

Chairman Miles asks about lighting and Mr. Hoetzlein states that they will provide a lighting schedule which will detail the proposed lighting for the buildings and associated parking lots. Mr. Kohberger asks what the first phase of construction will be. It is explained that the first phase will be the interior renovations and the conversion of existing space. Mr. DiPietro asks if there has been any consideration for alternative energy options with respects to the former school. Mr. Hoetzlein says they have not had any serious discussions on the topic but did concede that air-source heat pumps could be a possibility.

In preparation for the next meeting, Mr. Hoetzlein remarks that they will look into providing a preliminary landscaping plan, get a better idea of stormwater and sanitary sewer capacity, and refine which direction they are going in as far as HVAC components.

Chairman Miles asks if there will be additional signage on these properties. They say that they will not be adding any new signage but will instead only use the existing signs. With no further questions, Mr. Hoetzlein thanks the board for their consideration.

AGENDA ITEM – Site Plan Review and Special Use Permit Application – 226 Bowlby Rd

Sydney Shivers, developer for the solar project (DG SOLAR), introduces herself to the board. She states it is going to be a 4.2-megawatt AC solar site which consists of approximately 12,000 panels spread across approximately 20 acres. They will be fixed-tilt panels with an anti-glare feature and will be community solar which will tie into NYSEG's distribution grid.

Ms. Shivers states that they are proposing a 20-foot-wide access road and that they will keep the existing vegetation to the extent practicable, but does note that this is an undeveloped forested property which will have to be cleared. She clarifies that this project will exclusively be on the east side of Bowlby Rd and that they will not be impacting any wetlands and have received the non-jurisdictional letter from NYS DEC.

There is some discussion on the stormwater features and the Stormwater Pollution Prevention

Plan (SWPPP) which will be reviewed by the Chemung County Stormwater Engineer, Jimmie Joe Carl. It is understood that the SWPPP is a fluid document which will undergo revisions during the review process.

Attorney Moore inquires about the provided visual impact photos and suggests that they provide a view that is looking directly into the site to get a better idea of what the visual impacts will be from the roadway.

Mr. Kohberger asks how this particular site was chosen. Ms. Shivers explains that it is a combination of owner interest and the location of distribution lines with enough grid capacity to handle the power generated.

Mr. DiPietro guides the discussion to the provided tree survey and asks the applicant to point out the area with the greatest number of invasive species. Mr. DiPietro remarks that when tree clearing is done it not only removes viable trees but eliminates other ecosystems as well.

Ms. Shivers asks the board if they would be willing to make a determination for lead agency for SEQRA review. Chairman Miles asks if anyone would like to make a motion for lead agency determination.

MOTION by Mike Kohberger for the Town of Elmira Planning Board serve as Lead Agency for the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA).

Second by Paul DiPietro

Ayes: Miles, McConnell, DiPietro, and Kohberger

Nays: None

Attorney Moore asks the applicant if the decommissioning plan accounts for any salvaging of the arrays. Ms. Shivers offers to include more detail, including an itemized breakdown of the costs. Mr. DiPietro asks how the environmental group (WSP USA, Inc.) responsible for the tree study came up with the total number of trees as 10,774. Ms. Shivers says that they physically counted approximately 75% of the area and then extrapolated the remaining 25%. The applicants thank the board and remark that they will begin preparing the information that was requested in preparation for the next meeting.

Chairman Miles asks if there is any other business for this board to address and hearing none, asks for a motion to adjourn.

MOTION by Ron McConnell to adjourn the meeting.

Second by Paul DiPietro

Ayes: Miles, McConnell, DiPietro, Kohberger

Nays: None

The meeting ends at 8:24 pm EDT