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Planners to review solar power plant plans

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BY TONY NAUROTH

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FORKS TWP. | A solar energy generating plant cleared its first hurdle Thursday night when township planners made the unusual decision to review final plans for it at their Aug. 26 workshop meeting.

The plant is intended to provide up to 20 percent of the Crayola LLC's energy needs.

The 3 megawatt plant, to be built by the Spanish solar power company Fotowatio, will cover 15 acres in a 128-acre tract just north of the Crayola factory at Kesslersville and Uhler roads. It must be running by Dec. 31, or the company loses special tax credits provided by a law that expires on that date.

"Without the tax credits," co-project manager Johann Scheidt told the planning commissioners, "It's a no-go."

"This is a big project," Scheidt said. "It's not going to break records but it's big for the Northeast."

Crayola officials said the design, construction and operation of the system is simple.

Planner Vito Tamborrino Jr. said the board should move cautiously. If the board were to approve the panels, what would prevent someone else from coming in and building windmills, he asked.

Crayola officials agreed to specify they would install only the 6-foot tall panels. The commissioners discussed the need to change township zoning regulations to meet emerging technologies.

There was no objection from residents, even though the hearing room in the municipal building was at least half full.

George and Rachel Hoagland, who live across a road from the property, gave resounding approval to the plan.

"Just for the record the Hoaglands support the project," said George Hoagland, although he said they would not want lights installed, as several commissioners suggested.

Tom McInerney, who also lives across the road, said Crayola would have to take measures to keep children from trespassing. But he also approved the project, saying, "My fear always was that a developer would come in there and build rows and rows of houses with lots of screaming kids. This will sit there quietly. It's a fine neighbor."

The final plan would have to be approved by township supervisors early enough for construction to be complete and the panels on line by Dec. 31.

"That would take at least two months," Scheidt said.

Staff writer Tony Nauroth can be reached at 610-759-4599 in Nazareth, 610-258-7171 in Easton or [tinauroth@express-times.com](mailto:tnauroth@express-times.com).