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### Forks planners glowing over solar plant

#### Fast track: Commissioners agree to speed up process for Crayola.

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Forks Township planners have decided to speed up the approval process for Crayola's proposed solar power plant.

The Planning Commission on Thursday night agreed to rule on the plan in two weeks, rather than next month, after hearing a proposal that impressed commissioners and residents.

The crayon company hopes to turn roughly 15 acres of its property into a bank of solar panels. Those panels would absorb energy from the sun, which would then be converted into electricity to help power the Crayola plant. But the project needs to happen soon, according to Johann Scheidt of the Fotowatio Group, a Spanish energy company overseeing the project.

Scheidt told the commission that Crayola hopes to receive the Solar Energy Tax Credit, a federal program that would pay for 30 percent of the project.

"Without the tax credit, it's a no-go," Scheidt said.

The program expires at the end of 2008, meaning Fotowatio wants to get to work by the middle of September. It will take about two months to complete construction of the solar panels. Interviewed after the meeting, Scheidt declined to say how much the project would cost.

Fotowatio has built solar plants in Europe, including one in Spain that's one of the largest in the world. That one is a 20 megawatt plant. The one in Forks would be three megawatts.

"It's not going to break records, but for the Northeast, it's very significant," Scheidt said.

The commission voted 5-1 to revisit the project in two weeks. If the plan is recommended, it will go to the township supervisors for final approval Sept. 4.

Commissioner Vito Tamborrino Jr. cast the no vote, saying he wanted more time to review the project. He asked several questions about the plan, mainly having to do with security.

"It's going to be a novelty, say, for the kids," he said. "I would definitely make sure we have a complete perimeter fence."

A fence is part of the plan, Scheidt said. It would likely be 10 to 12 feet tall. The fence was supported by residents near the plant, who say they welcome the project because it brings them what they hope will be a quiet neighbor.

Tamborrino also asked what happens if, in 20 years or so, Crayola decides it wants to switch from solar power to wind turbines. Does the township's approval now give the company free reign in the future?

No, said solicitor Karl Kline, who added that Tamborrino's question raised another point: The township doesn't have any zoning regulations on solar power, something it should probably correct.

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