



# VOT ORDINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING Minutes

VILLAGE OF TILTON  
4/23/2026 5:30 pm  
1001 TILTON RD, TILTON IL 61833

1. CALL TO ORDER
2. ROLL CALL

## **Attendance**

### **Present:**

Members: Brian Dunavan - IT Director, Lori Fields - Village Clerk, Tiffany Jones-McClellan - Village Administrator, Vanessa Sims - Board Trustee, Cassidy Warrick - Treasurer, Mike Weidenburner - Board Trustee

### **Absent:**

Members: Courtney George - Board Trustee, Billy Wear - Village Mayor

3. EARTHRISE SOLAR

Trustee Weidenburner explained that after the last meeting, Earthrise provided a written rebuttal to various ordinance provisions, which would be the focus of today's discussion. Village Attorney Dave clarified his role was to take notes about the discussion for consideration in the next draft rather than provide legal debate.

### **Principal Use Requirements (Section 350.52)**

Emory Osman from Earthrise raised concerns about the 2.5-mile setback requirement between solar facilities, noting that existing solar facilities within that distance (such as one north of the old GM Foundry site) would prohibit their project under the current language. He also questioned the prohibition of utility-scale solar within the first half-mile tier, arguing it would prevent their project since much of it falls within that zone.

The Earthrise attorney expressed concern that the 2.5-mile radius could extend beyond the village's zoning jurisdiction, potentially into other counties, questioning the village's authority to regulate beyond its corporate boundaries and 1.5-mile extraterritorial jurisdiction.

A community member asked about community solar size limits, noting community solar is typically 5 megawatts or less, while this project is 188 megawatts. Osman clarified their interpretation of whether the setback requirements apply to both community and utility-scale projects.

### **Setbacks**

Osman stated that the proposed 1800-foot setback from residences was "overly excessive" and "prohibitive to the project." He explained that their site requires a "custom approach" to setbacks because more homes are directly impacted in Catlin's jurisdiction than Tilton's. He described how

different areas of the project have varying circumstances - the north side borders the interstate with no residents, while the eastern side has non-participating homeowners with existing vegetation across the road.

Earthrise requested that Tilton's setbacks align with the state siting law, while proposing extended setbacks in the most visible areas along Tilton-Catlin Road through "good neighbor agreements" with landowners. Trustee Weidenburner noted that a third-party consultant had previously indicated the 1800-foot setback was excessive.

Trustee Sims pointed out that Section 350.52(D)(4) allows participating property owners to approve closer setbacks. Trustee Weidenburner emphasized that the village views this as an extraordinary project requiring careful consideration, noting concerns about future town growth being limited if the solar farm is "on our doorstep."

### **Stormwater and NPDES Requirements**

Osman requested more specificity about what equipment or activity creates the village's stormwater concerns, whether related to panels or other components. He explained that groundwater testing requirements would be "prohibitive to financing and insurability" of the project, not because they believe it would cause problems, but due to potential liability issues from activities that occurred before their project.

The Earthrise attorney argued that singling out solar projects for testing requirements while not applying them to other uses raises "due process and constitutional issues" and could be viewed as "arbitrary and capricious."

Trustee Weidenburner explained his perspective that driving 15-foot-deep piles could potentially allow contaminants to penetrate the aquifer, and that baseline testing protects both the village and the developer. He emphasized they weren't trying to single out solar projects but were addressing new types of development they hadn't encountered before.

A community member with agricultural experience noted the project area has unique surface drainage characteristics and argued that unlike other industries with containment systems, "this industry doesn't have containment to contain the water for the runoff."

The village engineer mentioned that Earthrise would need to obtain a SWIFT permit from Illinois EPA and potentially install detention ponds if certain disturbance volumes are exceeded.

### **Ground Cover and Buffer Areas**

Earthrise requested alignment with the Illinois Pollinator Friendly Act, explaining that pollinators need to reach 36 inches in height to propagate properly, while the ordinance limits vegetation to 10 inches. Osman suggested an alternative approach allowing the height limit to be imposed only later in summer after native species have time to establish.

Trustee Weidenburner questioned whether shorter pollinator species exist. The discussion revealed solar panels would be 5-7 feet off the ground when flat, with lower clearance when tilted. Earthrise

indicated their environmental director would attend the next meeting to address vegetation questions in detail.

Trustee Weidenburner suggested different height requirements inside versus outside the fenced area as a potential compromise. Earthrise noted they would work with the Soil and Water Conservation District on vegetation management plans.

### **Facility Visibility and Screening**

Osman pointed out redundancy in the ordinance language requiring screening around the entire perimeter while also requiring additional screening if residential development occurs nearby. He noted this creates confusion since the facility would already be screened.

Trustee Weidenburner discussed preference for wood fencing with evergreens for visual appeal and noise reduction, acknowledging concerns about maintenance costs. Earthrise explained that operations and maintenance teams typically source locally for fence maintenance and other upkeep work.

The discussion touched on wind load considerations for opaque fencing and the need for professional maintenance teams. Earthrise provided examples from their Gibson City project where they replanted trees that died during construction to maintain compliance.

### **Glare and Reflection**

Earthrise requested clarification on terminology, asking that the ordinance use either "glare" or "light reflection" consistently rather than both terms. Osman explained they conduct glare studies for all projects with the goal of showing no glare, using reference points at various heights and times of day to identify and mitigate any issues through vegetation or screening.

Trustee Weidenburner requested that glare studies include different height perspectives relevant to the rural community, including tractors, combines, and semi-trucks. The Earthrise attorney recommended using "glare" as the technical term, noting FAA regulations use this terminology.

### **Lighting and Cooling Systems**

Trustee Weidenburner emphasized the importance of maintained lighting for safety, citing past issues with businesses that installed lights but failed to maintain them. Regarding cooling systems, he suggested concrete barriers or containment around cooling equipment to address runoff concerns.

Osman explained that cooling systems would be located at inverter locations and the project substation, with inverters containing trace amounts of mineral oil caught by containment systems. He agreed to research substation fluid containment requirements for the next meeting.

An electrical engineer in attendance noted that newer transformers typically use biodegradable vegetable oils rather than toxic materials, and that substations are designed with concrete containment systems per National Electric Code requirements. He stated that transformers with hazardous materials like PCBs are no longer manufactured for projects of this scale.

## **Power and Communication Lines**

Earthrise requested clarification on the 24-inch underground burial requirement, asking if it applied to all wiring. They explained they prefer above-ground connections between panels using a cable system that runs just below the panels, with underground routing from panel strings to inverters.

Trustee Sims confirmed the village wants all wiring at least 24 inches underground. Osman requested an exception for the cable system connecting panels, which would run 6-12 inches below the panel framework.

## **Roads and Snow Removal**

Earthrise stated that their engineering team indicated anything below 4 inches of snow clearance "would cause more damage to the access road itself than what it's trying to achieve." Trustee Weidenburner strongly disagreed, emphasizing that first responders need clear access regardless of snow depth, stating he wouldn't accept safety being compromised for road preservation concerns. Osman agreed to discuss the issue further with their team to find a solution that addresses safety concerns while maintaining road integrity.

## **Wildlife Passage**

The Earthrise attorney expressed concern about the lack of definition for "wildlife passage" and questioned whether this requirement would apply to other land uses or single out solar projects. He suggested using existing definitions from IDNR or Illinois Nature Preserve Commission rather than creating new undefined terms.

Trustee Weidenburner acknowledged the legal concerns but noted that a 1400-acre project displaces more wildlife than typical developments like residential subdivisions or grain elevators. He clarified they weren't trying to discriminate but were addressing the unique scale of this project.

## **Fencing and Landscaping**

Earthrise requested lowering the fence height to align with Catlin's requirements for project consistency. They agreed to barbed wire additions and opaque screening as suggested. Trustee Weidenburner expressed preference for wood fencing despite higher costs, noting benefits for wind, noise, and visual appeal.

The discussion addressed concerns about fence maintenance and wind load considerations. Trustee Sims explained that the mayor's intention for the 10-foot chain link fence was to protect pheasant and quail populations from predators.

## **Weed Management Plan**

Osman confirmed they would have a weed management plan and offered to bring it to the board for approval prior to construction. He explained they typically use spot treatments and are piloting a sheep grazing program at their Cumberland County project on about 160 acres, though this requires landowner cooperation and agreement modifications.

The discussion covered details about sheep grazing, including the need for specialized fencing, taller panels, and rotation systems. Community members shared knowledge about local solar grazing operations and requirements.

## **Noise Levels**

The Earthrise attorney recommended stopping the noise provision after the first two sentences, noting that Illinois Pollution Control Board regulations are complex and the ordinance's additional standards aren't consistent with state rules. Trustee Sims suggested restricting pile driver hours to 8 AM to 3 PM due to extreme noise levels.

Osman explained that solar projects produce minimal operational noise compared to wind farms, with inverters being the primary noise source and intentionally located centrally within parcels away from roads. He confirmed they would submit noise studies with their application, aiming to maintain normal background noise levels outside the fence line.

## **EMF Testing**

The Earthrise attorney reiterated concerns about singling out solar projects while noting that EMF exposure occurs throughout daily life. He stated that proper setbacks should ensure EMF levels are comparable to surrounding areas and suggested testing outside the project where people could be exposed rather than inside.

Trustee Sims raised concerns about people with pacemakers, including potential first responders, prompting discussion about warning signs and safety protocols. A community member shared concerns about electromagnetic sensitivity and potential health impacts, referencing issues reportedly experienced by a former mayor with a pacemaker near wind turbines.

An electrical engineer explained that DC panels produce minimal EMF, with higher levels occurring at inverters and transmission lines. Osman noted they would need to research EMF levels and transmission line voltages (expected to be 69-138 kilovolts) for more detailed information.

## **Solid Waste Disposal**

Trustee Weidenburner requested information about storage timeframes and disposal plans for broken panels, emphasizing the need for record-keeping requirements. Osman acknowledged this was an important question they hadn't adequately answered previously, explaining that Gibson City (their first operational project) had just gone online, giving them operational experience to draw from.

The discussion revealed that newer projects include "stone mode" technology that automatically adjusts panels during hail storms to minimize damage, reducing the volume of damaged panels requiring disposal. However, concerns remained about disposal plans for both construction damage and long-term needs.

### **Facility Ownership and Liability**

Earthrise requested quarterly rather than immediate access for village inspections, preferring 24-hour notice for safety and planning purposes. Trustee Weidenburner agreed that 24 hours notice would be sufficient for most situations while maintaining village oversight.

### **Decommissioning and Recycling**

Osman argued that requiring recycling agreements 35 years in advance was impractical, noting that the industry has changed significantly and many projects haven't yet reached decommissioning. He explained that panels are guaranteed to maintain 82.5% efficiency after 35 years, creating potential secondary markets rather than just recycling needs.

Community members expressed strong concerns about the lack of current disposal plans, with one stating "you guys have no answer for if something was damaged today" and emphasizing the importance of having solutions from day one rather than waiting 35 years.

An electrical engineer assured the committee that the scrap metal value (steel, copper, aluminum) from decommissioning would more than cover removal costs, providing a backup plan even if the company no longer exists. However, questions remained about panel disposal specifically.

### **Emergency Response and Safety**

Trustee Weidenburner inquired about employee fire safety training and emergency response capabilities. Earthrise explained they have access to specialized solar facility training programs and would develop emergency response plans in coordination with local fire and police departments. Community members raised concerns about volunteer fire department response capabilities, noting that Tilton often responds first to calls in the area. The discussion emphasized the need for proper safety equipment and training for local emergency responders.

### **Cultural and Environmental Resources**

Earthrise confirmed they conduct environmental studies including cultural resource surveys to identify cemeteries. They follow a "full avoidance" policy, setting back 50-100 feet from cemeteries and avoiding development on wetlands or areas of cultural significance.

Trustee Sims noted discovery of additional graves near their cemetery about 15 years ago. Trustee Weidenburner observed bald eagles in the project area, prompting discussion about endangered

species protections and required setbacks from active nests, which are regulated at state and federal levels.

### Road Use and Improvements

Osman explained their comprehensive road use process, including transportation impact analysis, pre-construction road upgrades, maintenance during construction, and post-construction repairs. They work with road commissioners and outside consulting companies, taking before-and-after documentation and sometimes leaving roads in better condition than originally found.

### Financial Security and Permits

Earthrise requested reducing the required insurance rating from A+ to A- while maintaining strong financial guarantees, noting greater availability of A- rated institutions. They also requested that decommissioning bonds be required at building permit stage rather than special use permit stage, when design numbers would be more accurate.

The committee expressed preference for maintaining strong financial security given the 35-year project timeline, with Trustee Weidenburner comparing it to choosing between reliable insurance companies.

### Public Comment

A community member expressed confusion about the meeting's purpose, feeling it seemed more focused on tailoring ordinances to meet Earthrise's expectations rather than protecting Tilton's interests. Trustee Weidenburner clarified that the dialogue was necessary for making informed decisions, emphasizing they were trying to understand all perspectives rather than simply accommodating the developer.

The discussion concluded with appreciation for the respectful dialogue and acknowledgment that additional information would be provided at future meetings.

#### 4. ADJOURN

##### Motion:

MOTION TO ADJOURN AT 750PM

Motion moved by Mike Weidenburner and motion seconded by Vanessa Sims. 2 AYES, 0 NAYS, MOTION PASSED

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LORI FIELDS-CLERK

