

TOWN OF GRANT
Public Hearing
Tuesday, August 18th, 2026
Held at Ryder's Roadhouse 9031 County Road WW
6:00 pm

Guests Present: Stefanie Schlapa, Jodi Lomma, Kathleen Rogers, Sharon Schwab, Doug Steltenpohl, Kevin DeBoer, Pamela DeBoer, Darin Meyers, Sherry Meyers, Lisa Walecki, Jeanne Eggebrecht, Jane Jackan, Michael Gagas, Kitty Gross, Julie Lampert, Lee Lampert, Kris Thome, Jessy Wolosek, Amy Kolo Elmhorst, Brian Elmhorst, Dan Fritsche, Matthew Schlapa, Diana Luecht

CHAIR SCHWAB CALLED THE FIRST PUBLIC HEARING TO ORDER AT 6:00PM

Schwab confirms both hearings were properly noticed.

The purpose of the first Public Hearing is to receive comments regarding the proposed amendment to the Town of Grant Comprehensive Plan, per Wis. Stat. 66.1001(4)(d).

The amendments provide an updated Solar Overlay map and text. The boundary of the Vista Sands Solar project is being added to the map, and an outdated status of the project is being removed from the text. The changes will help guide the future growth and development in the Town of Grant.

Schwab explained the history of the Town of Grant's Comprehensive Plan, which was initially established in the early 2000s under a state mandate requiring all towns to have a plan by 2010. While the plan is routinely updated every ten years, the Town of Grant did not anticipate utility solar interest in the town. In 2023, the Town of Grant followed the Town of Plover's example to become one of the first in the state to create a solar overlay map and rationale statement outlining resident preferences for solar placement, which was subsequently approved by the Portage County Planning & Zoning Committee and County Board. In 2024, as the footprint for the Vista Sands Solar project became clearer, the town revised its solar overlay map and approved an updated comprehensive plan following a public hearing. That revision was rejected by the Portage County Planning & Zoning Committee. The ultimate approval for the Vista Sands Solar location—notable as the largest contiguous solar project in the United States and the second largest overall—was decided by three members of the Public Service Commission. Today's public hearing addresses two small changes to the plan: a revision to the solar overlay map to reflect the Vista Sands Solar project and an update to one text paragraph with a status that is outdated. Specifically, this sentence from page 1 "A second large-scale solar energy project is early in the permitting process"

Plan Commission Chair Jodi Lomma reported that the notable changes to the solar overlay map include adding the boundaries for the Vista Sands Solar project (marked in purple) as of April 29, 2026. Vista Sands Solar has indicated that no further significant boundary changes are expected. The planned solar area is bounded by Prairie Drive to the north, with confirmation that the project will not extend south of Kellner Road. The text change in the plan is referenced in red. Chair Lomma stated that the Plan Commission recommends these updates to ensure the comprehensive plan remains accurate and correctly reflects current developments for future planning purposes. Additionally, she noted that a 2026 state senate bill, which proposed allowing local governments to veto solar and wind projects, failed to pass during the legislative session. Schwab adds there was an appeal filed by the Wisconsin

Wildlife Federation to protect threatened species in the Buena Vista Wildlife Area. The map reflects the agreed changes with a one half mile border between the grassland area.

Why is the Plan Commission recommending we make this change?

- Ensure that the Comprehensive Plan is up to date
- Enables the Town to be prepared for any legislation that could be proposed to grant local government's approval authority before the Public Service Commission grants a certificate (like Senate Bill 3)
- The updated map reflects the settlement of the appeal that the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation filed against Vista Sands Solar project to protect the Buena Vista Wildlife Area. (Conservation areas)
- The revised documents can be submitted to Portage County Board of Supervisors to obtain approval to update the County Comprehensive Plan documents

How does this change get made?

1. Town of Grant Plan Commission passed Resolution 2026-03 to recommend this change on 7/1/2026
2. A public hearing is conducted to hear feedback (tonight's meeting)
3. Town of Grant Town Board will then consider an ordinance to approve the change
4. Revisions will be submitted to the Portage County Planning and Zoning Committee to be reviewed by the Portage County Board of Supervisors. If approved, this can be added to the Portage County Comprehensive plan documents

Lomma anticipates a December time frame for finalizing the changes with Portage County. Schwab distributed proposed change to verbiage:

The Plan Commission recognizes that both Portage Solar LLC (and Vista Sands Solar) have completed the permitting process and been approved by the Wisconsin Public Service Commission. The parcels that have been leased by each project are identified by this filing and depicted in the areas by pink and purple shading, respectively.

Public Comment:

Michael Gagas – upset protections were implemented for wildlife and not for people.

Lisa Walecki – happy to have the solar panels more than farmland. Hopes that the solar will help the groundwater rise and wildlife will appreciate the change.

Darin Meyer – what future expansion other than the affected area would be anticipated? Would they expand to the southern district? Schwab – one of the deterrents is there is a lot more wetland to the south – solar can be implemented in those areas but it is more expensive. She hopes the overlay map will act as a deterrent. In truth, the PSC was supposed to acknowledge our zoning ordinance, but they did not. They were supposed to consider the Town of Plover zoning, they did not. In terms of expansion, it is possible but unlikely. There is another large solar project east of 39 called Porchlight Solar and they are looking more toward the Town of Stockton.

Sherry Meyer – The area that is in purple – is that mostly unused farmland or are they going to be cutting down trees? Schwab confirms it is mostly farmland.

Kris Thome – Is there nothing we can do about this?

Michael Gagas – 3 people in Madison decided this?

Schwab explained that the solar developer had successfully secured private land leases for the project. She confirmed that any energy project exceeding 100 megawatts is decided at the state level rather than by local government. However, the Town of Plover and the Town of Grant intervened in the state process. This intervention allowed the towns to secure a joint development agreement, providing local protections against issues such as road damage. Schwab noted that despite 1,725 public comments, the Public Service Commission still approved the project. Following the approval, the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation filed an appeal with the Public Service Commission. Schwab concluded by stating that, ultimately, the solar companies got what they wanted in terms of size but there were modifications in the primary locations.

Outrage from the audience regarding the lack of public input on the project.

Amy Kolo Elmhurst – concern about roads and when they are going to be fixing roads.

Outrage regarding the decommissioning of panels and suspicion that funding will not be available after the commissioned period ends.

Public Hearing closed at 6:22PM.

CHAIR SCHWAB CALLED THE SECOND PUBLIC HEARING TO ORDER AT 6:22PM

The purpose of the Public Hearing is to receive comments regarding the proposed amendment to the Town of Grant Zoning Ordinance.

The amendments to the Zoning Ordinance include the definition of Data Center and propose a new floating district for their real or potential development. Data Centers will be prohibited in all existing districts. This change will help guide the future development in the Town of Grant.

Schwab explained that the Town of Grant has maintained its own independent zoning since the mid-1960s, unlike most other towns in Portage County, which fall under county-level zoning. Because the Town of Grant retains local zoning authority, the town can respond and act much more quickly to land use matters. Schwab noted that while utility solar projects are decided at the state level, other new developments—such as data centers—remain completely under local control

Lomma presents:

Lomma noted that while data centers were previously built primarily in metropolitan areas, developers are now seeking opportunities in rural areas due to more affordable land and labor costs. She highlighted that Wisconsin's first hyperscale data center became operational in Mount Pleasant in June 2026, and there are currently dozens of data center projects either under construction or in the planning phases across the state. Lomma emphasized that it is both timely and relevant for the town to proactively enhance its zoning ordinance to address this trend. The primary goal of this zoning update is

to ensure that all future development decisions incorporate citizen input, are made locally, and that natural resources are thoroughly protected through the Conditional Use Permit (CUP) process.

Why are we updating the Zoning Ordinance?

- Proactively updating the Ordinance to include Data Center definition and where data centers could be located
- Protect natural resources and infrastructure in the town
- Ensure that decisions made about Data Centers in the Town of Grant are made locally with citizen input
- Leverage conditional use permits to place strict conditions on a project

How did we decide what to include?

- Reviewed several Wisconsin cities and town's ordinances to capture best practices on data centers
- Consulted with Lynn Markham, Land Use Specialist with the Center for Land Use Education
- Various articles/papers from Urban Land Institute, Zoning Practices from APA, Milwaukee Journal, and other online research over past 5 months

What is being changed?

- Data Center Definition
- Prohibiting Data Centers in existing Districts
- New Floating Zoning District
- Definition of a Floating district
- Adding Data Centers as conditional use in new district
- Updating Appendix A

Definitions

- **Data Center** means establishments used primarily for the storage, management, processing, and transmission of digital data, which houses computer or network equipment, systems, servers, appliances, and other associated components related to digital data storage and operations
- **Floating zone** or unmapped zone is a flexible zoning district written into a town's zoning ordinance but omitted from the official zoning map. It "floats" above the community until a property owner petitions to apply it to a specific parcel, "landing" the zone after public hearings are conducted and approval received from Town Board as well as County Board of Supervisors

Key Concepts of the Approach

- Creation of a new floating/unmapped district called Industrial 2 Data Center
- The Industrial 2 Data Center district will not appear in the zoning map until a parcel owner requests to apply it to a parcel through the rezoning process
- Rezoning is a legislative process – the Town Board has broad discretion in making the decision based on use of the property and public input.
- This new district only permits General Farming. Data Centers are a conditional use. This gives the Plan Commission and the Town Board the authority to place strict conditions on the project

Lomma emphasizes that this ensures the process is transparent, as there are only 2 uses in this district – general farming as permitted and data center as conditional. If a rezone is approved, then a conditional use permit application will be required. Conditions will be defined at the time of the application. Due to

Act 67, the conditions in a CUP must be reasonable and if the developer agrees to meet the conditions, then the CUP has to be approved. The Plan Commission had looked at prohibiting data centers completely, but there was concern that it could result in a lawsuit for municipal overreach. Also, perhaps in the future there may be an opportunity to explore data centers as they improve their operations and reduce environmental impact.

Industrial 2 Data Center

- **Intent:** It is the intent of this District to provide appropriately located, designed and regulated areas for data center developments/cloud computing infrastructure and related digital technology facilities. The objectives of this district include: To direct development in areas with proven access to high capacity fiber optic networks, robust electrical grids, and sufficient water supply ensuring these facilities do not overburden community utility services. To protect residential neighborhoods, farmland and environmentally sensitive areas from adverse effects such as noise, vibration, glare and air quality. To ensure buildings are harmonious with surrounding environment

Lomma noted that working with Lynn Markham was helpful because she was able to point us to other towns in the middle of this process. Lomma adds the most important information came from other towns facing data centers, such as City of Menomonie and Wisconsin Rapids.

Permitted Uses

- Data Centers are prohibited in every existing district
- Legally required to have at least one permitted use in a district, therefore the permitted use for Industrial 2 – Data Center is General Farming
- Town will proactively know a Data Center is being considered, as property owner would need to request property to be rezoned to Industrial 2 Data center
- Data Centers require a Conditional Use Permit in the Industrial 2 Data Center district

Why are we not pursuing a moratorium against Data Center Development?

- The changes being proposed to the Ordinance will provide the guidance needed to direct Data Center development
- The changes to the Ordinance can be approved by the Town Board and sent to Portage County for review and approval in a timely manner
- WI Statute 66.1002 applies, which says that Towns may only adopt a moratorium if at least one of the following applies:
 - Moratorium is needed to prevent a shortage in or the overburdening of public facilities – written report from registered engineer stating that this justifies need for moratorium
 - Moratorium is needed to address a significant threat to public health or safety that is presented by a proposed or anticipated activity – requires a written report from a registered engineer or public health professional stating that there is a significant threat that the need for a moratorium is justified

When will the changes go into effect?

- After the public hearing, the Town Board will need to approve the recommended changes to the ordinance
- The revised zoning ordinance will be sent to Portage County Planning and Zoning department

- The revised zoning ordinance would be added to the agenda for the next meeting for the Planning and Zoning Committee. . Once recommended for approval at that meeting, the next step is for the Portage County Board of Supervisors to recommend approval
- Should be able to be completed by November 2026

Public Comment

Amy Kolo Elmhurst – on the drafted map of district – is this still agriculture? The floating district covers the whole town? Lomma confirms that is correct. It could be residential or exclusive ag – there is no specific district assigned to data center development.

Matthew Schlapa – Nothing in the Town of Grant today meets the industrial 2 floating zone at this time, so a public hearing would be required, followed by town board approval. At that point if the resounding sentiment from citizens is we hate this then that's it, correct? Lomma confirms that is true, public sentiment is a large factor in the rezone decision.

Lomma notes specific conditions were not added to the zoning ordinance because the Plan Commission felt it was safer to set those conditions at the time of the request so they could be tailored to the situation of the data center. Lomma notes data centers might look totally different in 4 years and the Plan Commission felt it was safer to build the conditions at the time of the request instead of putting rules in place that could become obsolete.

Sherry Meyer – Clarifies the completion date is 2026. Lomma confirms she expects to have everything completed prior to the end of the year.

Darin Meyer – if the rezone was not approved by the town – could there be a lawsuit? Lomma read that if the town board has reasons documented as to why the decision was made, that it would be something that could hold up the development. Schwab concurs. Schwab notes that if a town board is responsive to residents, this change to the town zoning ordinance will ensure safeguards for the community.

Michael Gagas – why are we not pursuing the moratorium? Is it because there is a lack of funding? Lomma looked at pursuing a moratorium but notes that a moratorium is temporary. It is meant to give towns time to adjust their zoning ordinance, conduct research, or prepare documentation to be prepared for a data center discussion. A moratorium stops the processing, but what is permanent is the zoning ordinance. By updating the zoning ordinance, it is permanent and must be followed.

Schwab recalls that previously there was a coal plant desired in Town of Grant. At that time, a moratorium was used to establish a conditional use process.

Stefanie Schlapa thanks the Plan Commission for their work creating protections for the community. She adds that the Plan Commission work is mostly voluntary, and she is impressed with the safeguard this change to the zoning ordinance will ensure.

Matthew Schlapa – How many other townships are you aware of that have implemented this process? Lomma can't recall off the top of her head. Schlapa is curious if other examples of this process have worked.

The next Plan Commission meeting is scheduled for August 19th. In September, the town board will consider changes to the zoning ordinance. Lomma expresses thanks to residents for coming out for input. Thanks to Plan Commission members for spending the extra time, researching this topic. Also, thanks to Lynn Markham who was able to point out examples of other towns working on their data center ordinance.

Public hearing closed at 6:49PM.

Respectfully Submitted by Clerk

Stefanie Schlapa

Stefanie Schlapa

Approved: September 9th, 2026