

MERCER COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES

The Mercer County Planning Commission met Wednesday evening April 8th, 2026 at the Beulah Civic Center in Beulah, Eslinger called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. C.T.

Members Present: Mike Eslinger, Chris Renner, Casey Voigt, Kevin Hafner, Joey Neumiller, Andy Thomas, Gerald Bieber, Shane Cole, Rick Bauman

Members Absent:

Others Present: Chris & Sheri Santos, Duane Miller, Brandon Windhorst, Cody & Sydney Didier, Kevin & Linette Irwin, Lori Hammer, Sheila Roth, Wes Klein, Steve Guenthner, Michael Berg, Wes Berg, Jack Schuh-Basin Electric, Kristy Smith; Melissa Brooks & Stephanie Morales-Next Era, Brenda Cook, Julie Lenzen, Lynnae Weidner, Sara Cassidy, Erik Edison, Jodie & Warren Woroniecki, Riley Schriefer, Dennis Determan, Tara Dukart, Clifton Maas, Dallas Maas, Jason Gatewood, Curtis Eng, Brandon Loehr, Jesse & Kori Kaelberer, Brock Morgen, Kris & Nicole Martens, Vent Wallace & Brian Reisenauer-Fischer Gravel

Eslinger asked for any additions or corrections to tonight's agenda. Eslinger asked the board to move the River Run Update last after Other Business. Motion by Voigt to approve agenda, seconded by Cole, members present voted "aye", motion passed. Motion by Renner, seconded by Bieber, to approve the minutes of March 11, 2026. All members present voted "aye", motion passed.

New Business

Zoning Case 26-04-01

This public hearing is being held for the purpose of considering an application from Warren & Jodie Woroniecki for approval of a Conditional Use for a non-farm residence within an Ag Zoned District of the Mercer County Zoning District Map. The subject parcel is located approximately 19 miles south and 3 miles west of Zap. The subject parcel is 2.04 acres in size and is described as Parcel 1 in the SE4 of SE4 located in Section 20 T141N R89W of the 5th Principle Meridian, Mercer County ND. Mr. Woroniecki stated they are moving away from the main yard. Neighbors are family.

Eslinger asked for any further discussion. No further discussion. Motion by Voigt to approve zoning case, seconded by Bauman. Roll call vote, all members present voted "aye", motion carried.

Zoning Case 26-04-02

This public hearing is being held for the purpose of considering an application from Kris & Nicole Martens for approval of a Conditional Use for a non-farm residence within an Ag Zoned District of the Mercer County Zoning District Map. The subject parcel is located approximately 4.5 miles north of Beulah. The subject parcel is 10 acres in size and is described as NE4SE4NE4 located in Section 28 T145N R87W of the 5th Principle Meridian, Mercer County ND. This site was initially approved in 2021 but was never developed and now sold to the Martens. Eslinger reminded Martens of the two-year limit to start building. At the time in 2021 all questions were asked. Martens do have new approval for septic from Western Plains Public Health. Motion by Renner to approve zoning case, seconded by Neumiller. Roll call vote, all members present voted "aye", motion carried.

Temporary Use Permit # 671

This public hearing is being held for the purpose of considering an application from Fisher Sand & Gravel Co. for a temporary use permit for a gravel pit. The subject parcel is approximately 20 acres and is located approximately 7 miles north of Golden Valley. The landowner is Riley Schriefer. It's described as SW4 of Section 8, T145N, R89W of the 5th PM of Mercer County, ND. This is an existing gravel pit previously mined by Gravel Products in 2018. Vent Wallace and Brian Reisenauer is present. Eslinger mentioned following the "new" proposed ordinances such as weed control, water board approval to make sure no issues with underground water. Wallace asked for clarification. They do not plan on going down into an Aquaphor or existing water. They dug test holes 15ft depth surface to bottom and dug mostly clay. Voigt agreed. Riley Schriefer stated this location sits higher then the original location. Gravel Products never hit water. They won't be going further 12-15 ft, no chance of hitting water. Voigt agreed. Eslinger stated it should be ok but would like the terminology in there just in case. Mr. Schriefer will notify Commissioner Voigt if they would hit water. Bond requirement discussion. Amount to be set by County Commissioners at the meeting on April 15th. Working only daylight hours. Motion by Voigt to add conditions to the permit. Seconded by Bieber. Eslinger stated they are responsible for maintaining the road. They will leave it in good or better condition. Roll call vote, all members present voted "aye", motion carried.

Temporary Use Permit # 671

This public hearing is being held for the purpose of considering an application from Fisher Sand & Gravel Co. for a temporary use permit for a gravel pit. The subject parcel is approximately 20 acres and is located approximately 7 miles north of Zap. The landowner is Glenn Martin. It's described as a fraction of the N2 of Section 7, T145N, R88W of the 5th PM of Mercer County, ND. Eslinger stated this was also an existing pit at one time. All conditions approved in previous permit will be applied to this one. No further discussion. Motion by Cole to approve temporary use permit, seconded by Renner. Roll call vote, all members present voted "aye", motion carried.

Other Business

Zoning Case 26-03-01

After water board review there is a stipulation with the permit. Eslinger turned meeting over to Commissioner Voigt. There is not an issue as long as there is no further development. Commissioner Guenther asked if the state approved the approach. Mr. Santos stated in conversations with the state that no traffic study is needed and gave him info on permitting to widen the approach. Motion by Voigt to approve zoning case, seconded by Bieber. Eslinger asked for any further discussion. Bauman stated he would like the motion to state final approval from State DOT and bring to county commission meeting. Motion by Bauman to amend the motion, seconded by Renner. Roll call vote, all members present voted "aye", amendment carried. Roll call vote to approve Zoning Case 26-03-01.

Update on Sub-Committee from Chairman Eslinger from March 31st. Went well with lots of good input. Made good progress on the Data Center Ordinance. Next meeting is April 14th @ 9am @Stanton Courthouse. Evening meeting May 5th @ 6pm @ Courthouse. Kevin unable to make the meeting on the 14th, Commissioner Guenther will fill in.

Slide Show presentation by Next Era/Basin Electric on the River Run natural gas electric generating plant. Jack Schuh, Basin Electric, gave overview of Basin and partnership with Next Era. Melissa Brooks gave history on Next Era in gas fire generation and working in North Dakota. Kristy Smith, Next Era, stated they secured purchase option of 150 acres, proposed capacity about 1450mw, commercial operation date as early as 2030 and connect into Leland Olds 245-KV substation. Explained process, phases, designs and studies. Site is being evaluated. Construction could begin as early as 2027. Presentation is to introduce project to board. Discussed state permitting they will need. They've met with different emergency groups in the community. The gas plant will provide energy to the Data Center. Right now, they are just pursuing permit for natural gas facility but they do go hand in hand. 230 employees between the two. During construction there would be around 1000. Neumiller asked who these people would be reemployed by. Brooks responded the data center people would be employed by the data center which is not owned by Next Era or Basin Electric. The gas plant is a collaborative effort between Basin & Next Era. Neumiller asked who will be signing the paychecks. Brooks responded current ongoing equity conversations. 15 million in additional tax revenue in Mercer County with both projects. Public would like to see the numbers separated. Neumiller who they are going. Data Center customer has not been selected yet. This is to attract data center to the area. The customer could be Amazon, Google, Microsoft, Meta, etc. Discussion on large load program. Discussion on becoming a "Hub". Brooks stated they are not planning any wind or solar in Mercer County. They are looking at the potential for batteries and the gas fire generation plant. They are not currently looking at nuclear in Mercer County. Cannot have the gas plant without the data center and can't have the data center without the gas plant.

Motion to adjourn made by Cole, seconded by Bieber. The meeting was adjourned at 7:40 pm.

APPROVED:
Jen Neumiller, Land Use Administrator

ATTEST:
Mike Eslinger, Chairman