

Company pulls application for solar farm near Frankfort

By Mike Nolan
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A Chicago company that proposed a solar power plant near Frankfort has withdrawn its application after residents expressed concerns about potential pollution and affect on their property values.

The application by Surya Powered was to be considered by the Will County Land Use and Development Committee this past Tuesday, but a Sept. 6 memo from one of Surya's principals, Tej Patel, said his company was withdrawing the application.

Will County Board member Daniel Butler, whose 3rd District includes the site where the solar array was proposed, said he was "thoroughly surprised, I was pleasantly surprised" after learning of Surya's action.

Patel did not respond to messages seeking comment.

County staff, in an Aug. 15 report, recommended approval of the project.

The 5 megawatt plant was proposed on a 77-acre site at 24890 W. Center Road, about a quarter-mile north of Monee-Manhattan Road. There are homes on the north and west sides of the

property, according to the application and staff report.

Surya had a contract to buy the property for the plant, called MegaPlant Frankfort, according to its application, which proposed 12,000 solar panels.

County planning and zoning staff found the project would not be detrimental to or endanger the public's health or safety.

That was before a Green Gardens Township Planning Commission hearing Sept. 5. The solar farm would have been located in the township.

"We had a full house," commission Chair Mark Sarkisian said Thursday.

Some older residents said they were unsure of the technology and worried about the potential for chemicals leaching into the ground, Sarkisian said, noting residents in the area rely on wells for their water.

"There were also concerns that the provider is relatively new in the field, and what would happen when they are ready to decommission the plant," Sarkisian said. "Also, all of the neighbors said they felt it would hurt their property values."

He said representatives for Surya Powered began the

hearing with a presentation, but otherwise nobody spoke in favor of the project.

Butler, a Republican from Frankfort, said he was at the Green Gardens meeting.

"It was too close to a residential area," Butler said Wednesday. "A lot of people were concerned."

"They didn't want this huge solar array," he said.

Butler said the panels are made of toxic materials, and residents were worried about contamination. The application by Surya Powered filed with Will County said the solar panels are comprised of nontoxic materials.

"I love the idea of using the sun for energy but I am also very concerned about land pollution," Butler said.

He said under Illinois law the Will County Board could not have prevented the solar farm project from moving forward.

With the state encouraging development of renewable energy sources such as solar and wind projects, county governments are unable to ban or establish moratoriums on developments, and state law establishes siting and zoning standards for such green energy projects.