

Rejected solar farm proposals revisited



Robin Ellis, the New Lenox assistant village administrator and community development director, speaks against the proposed solar facility for New Lenox Township May 15, 2025. She also wrote to Will County officials to say the village believes the land would be best for a residential development. MICHELLE MULLINS/FOR THE DAILY SOUTHTOWN

Will County Board to reassess the plans following a court ruling

By Alicia Fabbre
FOR THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Will County Board members will re-vote next Thursday on six solar farm projects they denied over the last two years following a judge's ruling this week ordering them to issue the special use permits for the projects.

Will County Judge Bennett Braun, a Frankfort Republican, ruled Wednesday on the six cases and set a status date for April 16.

Members of the county board's Executive Committee Thursday

discussed the judge's ruling during a lengthy closed session but did not take any action. However, board Speaker Joe VanDuyne confirmed the six cases will be on the county board agenda next week.

Van Duyne, a Wilmington Democrat, also will present a resolution at next week's meeting asking state lawmakers to restore the county's citing authority over solar and wind farms. Recent changes in state legislation restricts a county's or municipality's ability to deny solar or wind proposals if the development meets state standards.

"The state of Illinois has put us in this county in a very peculiar situation," said VanDuyne, who was among the majority of county

board members rejecting the solar farm proposals.

The six proposals up for reconsideration include developments near New Lenox, Shorewood and Wilmington.

"We appreciate the judge's ruling and acknowledge the challenges elected officials face in balancing various interests," said Jeremy Price, director of development for Renewable Properties, which proposed an 85-acre solar farm near Wilmington. "We look forward to continued collaboration with Will County, and are excited by the opportunity to help diversify and increase energy production."

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Thornton Township Trustee Chris Gonzalez talks to attendees of a Thornton Township meeting in October 2024. Thornton Township Supervisor Napoleon Harris announced on Wednesday that Gonzalez had died. TESS CROWLEY/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Dolton interim fire Chief takes leave amid union concerns

By Olivia Stevens
DAILY SOUTHTOWN

Dolton interim fire Chief Quentin 'Q' Curtis has agreed to take leave from his position as the Village Board faces concerns from firefighters about his qualifications and equipment issues.

"I have heard the voices and concerns of our residents, clearly and sincerely," Mayor Jason House said in a news release Thursday announcing Curtis' leave. "This step is intended to allow our community space to refocus, heal and move forward together."

House said Curtis will "conclude ministerial duties to ensure no administrative tasks are left outstanding" during his leave.

The Dolton Professional Firefighters Association picketed Village Hall ahead of a board meeting Monday, after filing a lawsuit last month asking that Curtis be discharged for failing to meet requirements for his position.

Union President and fire Lt. Adam Farej said in a statement Thursday firefighters appreciate support shown for them during the board meeting's public comment period and will stay in communication with House and the board "to help keep the Dolton community safe."

"We appreciate residents for making their voices heard and village leadership for taking these concerns seriously," Farej said. "Dolton residents deserve qualified and accountable leadership at the fire department."

Farej said Wednesday that safety concerns escalated since House became mayor in May, as the village has failed to take action on issues such as broken apparatus and equipment.

"We have not had a department meeting to figure out what the plan is to assist with fixing this," Farej said Wednesday. "We think there's a lot of leadership failures right there with that, and with those leadership failures, obviously it's putting our safety at risk and it's also putting the residents' safety at risk."

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SAYING GOODBYE

Trustee Christopher Gonzalez, who raised concerns about a former supervisor, dies

By Olivia Stevens
DAILY SOUTHTOWN

Thornton Township Trustee Christopher Gonzalez, who raised concerns about spending of Tiffany Henyard, the former supervisor and Dolton mayor, died Tuesday at age 53.

Township Supervisor Napoleon Harris provided condolences to Gonzalez's friends and family in a township news release Wednesday. A spokesperson for Harris said the cause of death was not yet known Wednesday afternoon.

"I had the privilege of serving alongside Christopher and witnessing firsthand his unwavering commitment to the people of Thornton Township," Harris said. "He approached his role with integrity, compassion and a genuine desire to make a difference in the lives of others. Christopher wasn't just a colleague — he was a dedicated public servant who led with purpose and heart."

Gonzalez was first elected township trustee in 2021, serving

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Thornton Township Trustee Chris Gonzalez walks out of a special board meeting Oct. 30, 2024, in South Holland. The meeting was ended with his departure because of a lack of a quorum. TERRENCE ANTONIO JAMES/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Homer Glen OKs agreement to put some limits on license plate reader use

By Michelle Mullins
FOR THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Homer Glen will store data obtained from its license plate reader cameras for seven days in an effort to balance public safety with some residents' concerns over an intrusion of privacy.

The village will also only limit information collected from the cameras to be shared within Illinois, according to a memo of understanding between the Village Board and the Will County sheriff's office.

The board voted 5-1 Wednesday to approve the policy with the sheriff's office, which provides the village's police services.

In most communities, data from the cameras is stored 30 to 90 days, Trustee Robert Schaller

said. But Homer Glen residents have expressed concern keeping the data for 30 days was too much like "Big Brother," he said.

Schaller, a former police chief, said he doesn't anticipate there will be too many issues where important data will be lost if it is deleted after a week.

The agreement does allow some exceptions, including requests to preserve data for a criminal investigation sent to the sheriff's office from an Illinois law enforcement agency within that seven-day period or if there is a valid court order or subpoena.

Schaller said only the Will County sheriff's office has access to the license plate reader data and village officials cannot see the information that is collected. There is also no sharing the data

with federal partners.

The Homer Glen Village Board in December approved installing 12 license plate readers on key access points in the village.

The Flock camera system is designed to read a license plate number, state information and a vehicle's make, model and color. The cameras are not used to write tickets for speeding or other traffic violations, but can help deter crime or locate missing or endangered people, officials have said.

Critics of the system say its an invasion of privacy that creates a mass surveillance network and tracks innocent people during their daily travels.

Trustee Mike Lepore, who voted against installing the Flock

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Homer Glen Trustee Curt Mason, left, village attorney Mike Pasquinnelli and Mayor Christina Neitzke-Troike discuss village business Wednesday. MICHELLE MULLINS/FOR THE DAILY SOUTHTOWN