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Kendallville, Indiana

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Commercial solar proposal sent back to planners

BY MATT GETTS
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ALBION — The Noble County Commissioners sent a proposed zoning issue for commercial solar fields back to the Noble County Plan Commission following a public hearing Tuesday afternoon at the Noble County Office Complex-South.

"This is a work in progress," Noble County Commissioner Gary Leatherman said. "We want to get it right the first time."

The commissioners voted 3-0 to reject the current Commercial Solar Energy System Overlay District proposal approved on Sept. 16, sending the issue back to the plan commission. The issues discussed Tuesday involved tweaking the proposed ordinance, not an overhaul.

The plan commission could take up the issue as

soon as its Oct. 20 meeting. If it passes the ordinance with changes recommended by the commissioners, it would be sent back to the commissioners for potential adoption.

According to Noble County Plan Director Teresa Tackett, the overlay does not alter original zoning designations.

"The base zoning will change," Tackett said. "The overlay use is the only additional use allowed."

The commissioners did pass an ordinance dealing with residential and business use of solar. The ordinance sets guidelines for rooftop or ground-mounted solar operations generating less than 40KW "for the purpose of the generation of electricity to meet or offset all or part of the electrical need on the premises."

That ordinance will be part of the county Unified

Development Ordinance. The plan commission's commercial zoning ordinance, however, has met with some opposition.

The plan commission has been going over the requirements for a commercial solar field for months, spurred on by legislation proposed at the state level which would have set the requirements for solar fields throughout the state if a county did not have its own rules in effect. That legislation did not pass, but there is a concern it will be brought up in coming legislative sessions.

North Carolina-based Geenex, a solar energy company, has been offering land owners \$900 per acre per year in a corridor that follows high voltage electric lines already in place in northcentral Noble County. The company is also proposing to pay the property taxes for those



Fort Wayne attorney Jason Kuchmay, right, representing a group of Noble County residents opposed to a new commercial zoning ordinance under consideration, presents some information to Noble County Commissioners, from left, Anita Hess, Gary Leatherman and Dave Dolezal during a public hearing Tuesday at the Noble County Office Complex-South in Albion.



This photos shows the underpass in Garrett looking north on S.R. 327 from the Quincy Street intersection. Kendallville city officials say an underpass on Main Street is unlikely due to cost and engineering issues with such a project.

Underpass? Unlikely

Idea's been around since early 1900s but city sees project as infeasible

BY STEVE GARBACZ
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KENDALLVILLE — Don't expect to be going over or under train traffic on Main Street in Kendallville, maybe ever.

Ideas to build an overpass or underpass spanning the Norfolk Southern Railroad track in town just has a laundry list of problems, city officials said.

"Underpass" became a common refrain from multiple Kendallville residents on Tuesday after a stopped train blocked all three city crossings at Main Street, Riley Street and Park Avenue for about three hours.

The railroad said the stoppage was the result of "a significant violation," although didn't elaborate on what that meant. The train stopped after noon and didn't clear the crossings until just after 3:15 p.m.

Motorists who needed to get across the tracks were forced to use

existing overpasses at either S.R. 3 or Allen Chapel Road in order to get around the blockage.

The concept isn't at all new to Kendallville. The idea of an underpass was floated as far back as 1912, when city businessman Herman Krueger pushed for a tunnel under the railroad.

"For the past few years there have been many delays of pedestrians, buggies, wagons and automobiles at the Main Street crossing," Krueger said in a June 22, 1912 article in The Kendallville Standard "We need a 'sub-way' (underpass) and we're going to have it."

The idea of avoiding train traffic but driving under it — like drivers can do in Garrett — sounds good but presents numerous challenges and problems when actually put to paper.

Kendallville City Engineer Scott Derby said the first concern that pops up is that building and underpass

or overpass takes a much larger footprint than people might think. It's not as simple as tunneling under the tracks.

"My initial take is it would be difficult without adversely impacting or getting into some of the existing downtown buildings," Derby said, speaking first about an overpass.

Businesses like Spash-N-Dash Car wash and the former Family Video would likely be impacted, as well as the vacant pawn shop north of the tracks.

Derby and Mayor Suzanne Handshoe said people should take a look at the footprint around the Allen Chapel Road overpass, which was constructed in 2007 with both of them occupying their current offices.

That overpass was built in a much less developed area, but one structure still had to be purchased and

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RDC contributes \$20K toward Main Street manager

BY STEVE GARBACZ
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KENDALLVILLE — The Kendallville Redevelopment Commission is pledging some of its money toward helping the city hire a full-time Main Street manager.

With \$20,000 from the commission, matching a similar \$20,000 budgeted by the Kendallville City Council, the city has a foundation to start fine tuning a job description and looking for a person to manage the downtown.

On Wednesday morning, commission members voted to provide \$20,000 per year to Experience the Heart of Kendallville, the city's official Main Street organization, for the next four years before re-evaluating that level of support.

The money will be earmarked for helping pay the salary of a full-time Main Street manager, a position the city needs to get established not just as a requirement of the \$2 million Preserving Main Street grant it was recently awarded, but for long-term sustainability in downtown development and promotion.

The top of creating a hiring a new person to manage downtown came up earlier this year at the behest of the Kendallville Area Chamber of Commerce, which has been pushing to segregate the work its executive director, Kristen Johnson, is doing as the ex-facto head of Experience the Heart of Kendallville.

There's been in built in conflict there as the

Chamber is supposed to primarily be serving its dues-paying members, while Experience the Heart of Kendallville promotes all downtown businesses but only downtown businesses and events.

While the two organizations share some common overlap, the roles have become too intertwined and need to be separated.

Beyond that, the role of chamber director and downtown manager are separate and distinct and more than one person is able to tackle together, anyway, Johnson said.

"There's a lot of things we could be doing that we, capacity-wise, can't do right now," Johnson said of the downtown.

Experience the Heart of Kendallville hired consultant John Bry to serve as a Main Street administrator on a part-time basis while exploring a more permanent solution.

That searched received a boost when Kendallville was selected by the Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs for its brand-new \$2 million grant program, which comes with the requirement of having a Main Street manager.

Johnson said the grant also requires the city to become a nationally-credited Main Street, which requires not just a lot of work to initially obtain but also to maintain yearly.

The redevelopment commission had opted to wait to see what Kendallville budgeted for Main

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'Nunsense' brings laughs in Gaslight's CLC debut

BY SHERYL PRENTICE
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KENDALLVILLE — Retired theater educator Craig Munk is in the home stretch of achieving a goal that was 40 years in the making.

This weekend, Gaslight Playhouse — the community theater organization he founded in 1975 — will present the musical comedy "Nunsense," as its first production in its permanent home in the historic auditorium of the Community Learning Center.

The curtain goes up on the show Friday at 7:30 p.m. with additional performances Saturday at 7:30 p.m. and Sunday at 2:30 p.m.

Tickets for reserved seating are \$15 per person, and \$12 per person for

students and senior citizens. Tickets may be purchased online at www.gaslight-playhouse.org with a card.

Tickets may also be purchased at the CLC box office or at the door before performances with cash or check.

Gaslight Playhouse cannot accept PayPal or Venmo, and does not have the ability to swipe cards at the door.

The Gaslight Playhouse board of directors chose "Nunsense" for its first production in its new home, betting that audiences are longing for quality entertainment as pandemic restrictions ease.

"The appeal is the idea of an evening out for pure enjoyment," Munk said. "It's musical comedy at its best. It's pure fun and doesn't have a heavy message. It's

pure Broadway entertainment."

"Nunsense" is a full-circle moment for Munk, who came out of retirement to direct this show on the very stage where he began his career. He's directed "Nunsense" once before.

"I'm thrilled to come back here after 40 years," he said. "The last show I did here was 'The Wiz' in 1981. I'm honored and thankful to come back. I'm so pleased that the 1940 stage was saved."

"Nunsense" is an off-Broadway musical comedy about the Little Sisters of Hoboken, a one-time missionary order that ran a leper colony on an island south of France. The cook, Sister Julia, Child of God, accidentally killed off 52 convent

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