

BARRE TOWN PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES

The Town of Barre Planning Commission held its regular meeting and a public hearing on **Wednesday, October 21, 2015** beginning at **7:00** p.m. at the **Municipal Building**, Lower Websterville, to consider the following:

Members Present:

Cedric Sanborn	Charlie Thygesen
Chris Violette	Debra Pierce
George Clain	Claire Duke – 7:10 p.m.

Members Absent:

John Hameline

Others Present:

Jeff Blow	Tom White
Jack Mitchell	Carl Rogers
Gordon Booth	

Staff Present:

Heidi Bennett

1) **CHANGES TO THE AGENDA**

None

2) **APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**

On a motion made by Pierce, seconded by Violette the Planning Commission voted to approve the minutes from September 16, 2015

3) **WARNED PUBLIC HEARINGS (7:05 p.m.)**

None

4) **OTHER:**

(1): Solar Siting Task Force meeting recap

Enclosures: Two power point presentations from the last siting task force meeting

Date: October 16, 2015

**STAFF REPORT/REVIEW COMMENTS FROM CHRIS VIOLETTE,
PLANNING OFFICER**

I attended the September 17, 2015 solar siting task force meeting. Enclosed is a copy of the power point presentations presented at that meeting. This was the second of what will end up being seven meetings. The task force is made up of the following people.

Commissioner of Public Service or Designee: Commissioner Christopher Recchia
Commissioner of Housing and Community Development or Designee: Commissioner Noelle MacKay
Secretary of Natural Resources or Designee: Secretary Deb Markowitz
Representative of the Vermont League of Cities and Towns: Karen Horn
Representative of the Vermont Planners Association: Sharon Murray
Representative of the Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies: Adam Lougee
Representative of Renewable Energy Vermont: Andrew Raubvogel
Representative of an electric distribution utility: Robert Dostis
Landscape architect: Mitch Lefevre
Vermont resident with public policy and environmental and energy expertise: Sam Swanson

Little was said by task force members except for asking a few questions of the presenters. There were two presenters, Asa Hopkins who is the director of Energy Policy and Planning with the Public Service Department, and David Raphael a landscape architect and planner with LandWorks of Middlebury.

These meetings at this point are clearly about gathering information. How much and who task force is receiving information from is probably a fair question.

Mr. Hopkin's presentation basically talked about where the State is currently at with our energy demand, where it comes from, and how we get to 90% renewable by 2050. His focus was clearly on solar as that is what the task force is working on. In the end he showed the task force how much solar is estimated will be a part of the overall energy portfolio, how much solar will be needed, and how much land that will consume.

In an obvious pitch to down play the impact, he showed a comparison of how much land solar will take up compared to how much land Vermont actually has and how much land is used for roads. He also showed how much developed solar Massachusetts currently has and that it is a smaller state based on acres of land.

Mr. Raphael did not speak long; he mostly just submitted the enclosed information with regard to aesthetic and land use guidelines for siting ground-mounted solar projects. Much of what is discussed makes sense but seems to give more leverage to Town's than they actually have. Many of the suggestions in his documents would make sense and would give a town more say in aesthetics. How much weight the task force gives it remains to be seen.

There is clearly a strong desire on part of the state to substantially increase the amount of solar Vermont currently has. While the task force spoke little about what direction they will head, it is clear to me they have a significant lean towards more solar without a lot of regard to how Towns feel. I basis this opinion on two sessions that I attended at Town Fair with Chris Recchia, the commissioner of the Public Service Department, and it was clear to me that while there may be room for a few changes, there won't be a lot of changes because of the continued belief by them that this is what the people of Vermont want. If they give Town's too much control, "we" won't have nearly enough solar to meet the state renewable energy goals.

The remainder of the Tasks Forces schedule is as follows and will be held in room 11 at the Vermont State House:

October 22nd
November 3rd
November 13th
December 3rd
December 17th

COMMENTS:

CV gave a summary of his staff comment regarding the solar siting meeting

(2) Joint meeting with the Selectboard to discussion a Town position to offer the Solar Siting Task Force

Date: October 16, 2015

STAFF REPORT/REVIEW COMMENTS FROM CHRIS VIOLETTE,
PLANNING OFFICER

At some point it will be important for the Town of Barre to provide the Solar Siting Task Force with a position on the subject. I did not feel comfortable offering my opinion at the September 17th meeting. Plus while they took public comment, the comments were quite mean and spiteful and I'm not sure the people got anywhere with those types of comments. It would be best if the Town as a whole, the Selectboard and the Planning Commission, could have a joint comment to offer the Task Force when the time is right. A unified (if possible) and well throughout response while questionable how much weight it will have, will get us more credibility and hopefully given more consideration.

Agenda item two is designed to meet with the Selectboard and see whether this is common ground and if a joint position can be put forth.

COMMENTS:

Sanborn stated that the Town needs to be in agreement on lot coverage.

Rogers states that there are two ways to look at lot coverage: from the post and aesthetics. The post could be considered the only impervious surface.

White would like to push for the drip edge for lot coverage.

Blow said the post seems like a tactic to skirt the rules; doesn't want that.

Blow stated the whole purpose of having an Industrial Park is to create jobs. Blow states that he sees the Malone solar project different from the Town's. The Town is putting the panels on land they control. It's

an advantage when the town controls the solar array project. Blow is questioning whether the Town should be acquiring land that comes for sale in the Park to prevent this type of thing.

CV stated that if the new laws had gone into effect earlier, Malone's project wouldn't be viable.

Blow feels that the State is making up the rules as they go along with little forethought. The State has put things into place that has eroded Town's ability to collect taxes.

Blow feels zoning in the State of Vermont works; from water filtration, landfills and housing. Blow wants the State to sit back and let zoning have more say with solar panels.

CV states that if left to the Town's it's going be "not in my backyard" hence the State making these rules. The State claims this is what the people of Vermont want, but the question is how do we know this?

Pierce stated that meetings regarding solar siting are during the day, where it's mostly local people attending and not the vast majority of voters.

CV stated there's an organization called Energize Vermont, which appears to be a fairly significant organization. They have a map that lists towns that have come out to saying they're opposed to solar siting. The Town of Barre is included in there.

Pierce said that we should have suggestions for alternatives instead of saying that we don't want solar.

CV feels that the solar movement has gone way faster than anyone the State thought.

White would like to see the Town come together with one message, along with suggestions.

Duke stated that Addison County Regional Planning Commission has drafted "Aesthetic and Decommissioning Guidelines Regarding Commercial Solar Projects for Inclusion in Municipal Plans".

White & CV would like to see sites that can house more than one solar site – the ability needs to be done.

Pierce suggested a threshold, or a zoning designation that would allow a certain percentage for solar farms.

Rogers states that when Towns have an Industrial Park with a planned infrastructure the last thing they want to see is the land being sold for something that isn't producing jobs.

CV stated that Town's need more say.

Rogers read Selectboard resolution 1-15 asking for more Town input for solar siting for renewable energy projects. The resolution was from February 10, 2015 and request that local legislators develop amendments to State Statute giving Town's a more meaningful role in the permitting process for renewable energy.

Clain stated the Town's need to be able to govern and if the developer has an issue, there can be an arbitrator. He states that we don't want to give up on the intent of the Selectboard's resolution by now suggesting a series of modifications that ultimately don't give Town's a lot more say.

Mitchell asked the Planning Commission whether it has a proposal for the committee; CV stated that the PC is working on giving comments to the solar siting committee.

The self-imposed deadline to submit comments will be for the solar siting committee's December 3rd meeting.

CV would like to invite the Commissioner to a meeting.

Sanborn stated that the draft State energy plan is out and available for comment. The link will be sent out to everyone.

There's a consensus that a survey of Town residents needs to be taken.

Rogers suggested that the Selectboard hold a public hearing.

Clain requested that in any correspondence the Town sends that it be requested that they lessen the tariff rate for 3-phase.

(3) Begin discussion about a letter responding to the Beckley Hill solar project discussed at the last meeting.

Enclosures: Letter sent to Novus Energy responding to their 45-day notice for a 500Kw solar project on Beckley Hill.

Date: October 16, 2015

STAFF REPORT/REVIEW COMMENTS FROM CHRIS VIOLETTE, PLANNING OFFICER

Last month everybody should have received a copy of the 45-day notice we received regarding a proposed 500 Kw solar project on Beckley Hill. Based on comments from the September 16th P.C. meeting, I wrote a letter to Novus Energy and copied the Public Service Department and the Public Service Board, putting them on notice that the Planning Commission would not accept their desire to not meet the 100 foot setback requirement. I also mentioned how aesthetics will be a concern and we'll be looking for significant screening should the project move forward.

At some point in the near future, Novus Energy will file an application with the Public Service Board for the Beckley Hill Project. I'd like to be ready for a letter to be submitted before that application is filed. I assume we'll use many of the same arguments that have been used in the past but we know where those got us. There is no telling when the application will actually be filed.

COMMENTS:

A letter was received from Alex, stating that they have scraped the request for a waiver of setback.

The project will be smaller with less trees being cut.

5) **ZONING BYLAW AMENDMENT(S):**

Continue discussion regarding proposed zoning amendments – **no action taken**

Zoning Amendments

I've made a few more changes to the conditional use and site plan review sections as well as worked on some wording in the newly created renewable energy section. At some point when we have time we need to go through each proposed change and sign off on them.

6) **CORRESPONDENCE:**

Letter to Novus Energy responding to the 45-day notice for the proposed Beckley Hill solar project

GMP Certificate of Public Good application for changes to the Graniteville power sub-stations

Upgrade the sub stations. Plan is to eliminate one, and re-do the other.

7) **ROUND TABLE:**

8) **ADJOURN!**

On a motion by Pierce, seconded by Violette, the Planning Commission voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting of October 21, 2015 at 9:25 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Heidi Bennett

Cedric Sanborn, Chair

John Hameline

Charlie Thygesen Sr.

George Clain

Chris Violette

Claire Duke

Debra Pierce