

BARRE TOWN PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES

The Town of Barre Planning Commission held its regular meeting and a public hearing on **Wednesday, November 18, 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
John Hameline	Claire Duke

Members Absent:

George Clain

Others Present:

Carl Rogers	Jeff Blow
Rob LaClair	

Staff Present:

1) CHANGES TO THE AGENDA

Item 2a added
Item 4 added

2) APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

On a motion made by Duke, seconded by Hameline the Planning Commission voted to approve the minutes from October 21, 2015

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

None

4) OTHER:

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

Sanborn commended Violette on his presentation to the Selectboard the night before.

Violette stated that he was unable to attend the November meeting due to being out of town, but the meeting prior concentrated mostly on hearing from other towns. The committee heard from several town officials / Planning Commissions who were adamant that town's need some control over solar siting.

The Town of Randolph brought up the reserve/renewable energy credits being sent out of state – thought that wasn't advisable. Chris Reccia explained that sometimes it helps with big revenue projects, going on to say the means to stop this action aren't available. Reccia agreed that transferring REC's outside of the state needs to be looked at.

Lot coverage was brought up / no discussion

There was talk about the burden of reaching the energy goal and how some towns aren't contributing equally. It was suggested that if the state is going to continue to do this a possible percentage that every town needs to reach should be established. Feasibility for all the towns may not be there.

Deb Markowitz brought up something helpful; she asked if the wetland rules were too restrictive (wetlands and buffers) whereas putting solar panels up may not have a tremendous impact on the buffers, should there be some sort of loosening of the wetland regulation so panels can go closer to the wetland. The consensus is that doing this would be a good idea.

Chris Reccia did not like the idea of cutting trees to install the solar panels, he feels it's counterproductive.

A group of solar developers spoke. One speaker stated that ascetics are the main issue and it's difficult because ascetics are subjective and it's hard to find a middle ground. Another speaker was adamant that the current regulations are working, but did agree that REC's going out of town are a concern and made a statement that people will get used to these just as they did with power lines. Letting municipalities have input will only inject emotion. Another speaker stated the policy in place is working and is the hardest and most comprehensive in the nation. All solar developers agreed that new mandates every six months isn't fair for what they're trying to do. The last speaker stated that developers are listing and they understand what they're up against and are trying to do better when it comes to siting and trying to keep the panels as invisible as possible. He didn't like letting towns have more say because they're already dealing with the experts of the public service board/department and by going in front of a volunteer board in a municipality will complicate the whole scene.

CV stated that the committee has two more meetings and he'd like to shoot for the December 3rd meeting to have a letter from us (Town of Barre). CV thinks the letter needs to be mailed prior to the December 3rd meeting. Sanborn suggested that CV present the letter at the meeting. Hameline asked if CV needed people there to support him.

Jeff Blow stated that if the Selectboard and Planning Commission agree and submit something together, the more credence the Town will receive. Prior to last night he was emotional over the loss of the tax revenue and since last night he's had time to think about the comments that were made at the Selectboard meeting and I got the impression from some residents that he's opposed to solar. He states he's not opposed to solar, either as a resident or an elected official, but wants to see the Town a fair voice at the table. He feels a solar zone as part as zoning would be right. Towns that have zoning should be allowed to deal with setbacks, reasonable screening and even percentage of coverage. CV added that a solar overlay district would work perfectly. Blow stated that there needs to be a limit on how much land is getting developed a year. Blow stated that decommissioning needs to be addressed as well. Screening needs to be required so we're not being slapped in the face. Screening softens the impact.

Carl Rogers submitted comments from last night for the Planning Commission to use to the draft a letter to the solar siting committee.

Jeff Blow and Rob LaClair asked the Planning Commission to prepare for zoning changes if the laws regarding solar siting were to change. LaClair would really like to see the solar panels in the wetlands and flood plains. The panels can be built up.

Thygesen stated he's not against solar, but the business of placing solar panels in your town for the savings to benefit other towns isn't right. He doesn't like the for profit actions that are happening right now, it's not what Vermont is about.

Blow stated the Town wants authority to determine whether or not we're having solar, better decommissioning rules. CV wants the State to loosen up on wetlands.

Bullet points:

Sticking to the analysis done by ACT 250

Balancing production with land use

Decommissioning

Allow special case proximity development

Use a special ascetics grading system

Solar zone or overlay district allowing towns to determine where they feel solar can go

Prefer (strongly encourage) to use existing impervious surfaces over out in the field

Prohibit in industrial parks to tif districts unless municipally owned

Allowing for local benefit (host town and/or abutting land owners)

Allow for fringe siting along wetlands

Loosen the wetland rules

Give more weight to individual ascetics not just community wide

New power poles and lines should be evaluated

After a municipality has so many in their town there should be a moratorium

The setback that was passed is to large in some aspects and to small in others

The general public should have access to the land that is being used for the solar farms

Should be put in non-developable lands (brown fields / landfills)

Motion made by Violette, who will draft a letter with the Town of Barre's concerns to be signed by Jeff Blow and Cedric Sanborn, seconded by Sanborn. All in favor.

(2a) Handout from Claire Duke

Claire handed out an informational flyer from Addison County Regional Planning Commission regarding their proposed ascetic's guidelines meeting.

(3) Discuss Public Service Board letter for the Beckley Hill solar project – No application yet.

Still haven't received an application.

(4) 45-Day notice for Osborne Road

No discussion

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

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

6) **CORRESPONDENCE:**

7) **ROUND TABLE:**

8) **ADJOURN!**

On a motion by Violette, seconded by Pierce, the Planning Commission voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting of November 18, 2015 at 9:52 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Heidi Bennett

Cedric Sanborn, Chair

John Hameline

Charlie Thygesen Sr.

George Clain

Chris Violette

Claire Duke

Debra Pierce