

Town of Barre
Planning Commission
October 19, 2022

The Town of Barre Planning Commission held a meeting and public hearing on Wednesday, October 19, 2022 beginning at 7:00 p.m. in the Municipal Building at 149 Websterville Road, Websterville, VT.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

In person: Cedric Sanborn, George Clain, Terry Reil, Byron Atwood, and Mike Gilbar

Remote: Craig Chase

Absent: Chris Violette

STAFF PRESENT:

In person: Cindy Spaulding

OTHERS PRESENT

Remote: Thomas Hand (MHS Solar) and Justin Bolduc (Selectboard/resident)

In person: Barry Stryker (landowner on Lowery Road for solar)

A) CHANGES TO THE AGENDA

Mr. Sanborn called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and asked whether there were any changes to the agenda.

B) APPROVAL OF MINUTES

September 21, 2022 (special)

On motion by Mr. Gilbar, seconded by Mr. Reil, the Planning Commission approved the minutes of September 21, 2022 (special) as written. Vote 6-0-0.

September 27, 2022

On motion by Mr. Gilbar, seconded by Mr. Reil, the Planning Commission approved the minutes of September 27, 2022 as written. Vote 6-0-0.

C) NON-AGENDA PUBLIC COMMENT (if necessary limited at chair's discretion)

Mr. Sanborn asked whether there were any non-agenda comments – there were none.

D) NEW BUSINESS - NONE

E) OLD BUSINESS

- 1) Continue discussion with representatives of MHG Solar (Lowery Road Solar, LLC) regarding the proposed 4.99MW solar project on land owned by Barry Stryker.

STAFF REPORT BY CHRIS VIOLETTE

During the Selectboard's meeting on September 27, 2022, Thomas Hand of MHG Solar gave a presentation of the proposed 4.99MW solar project that could potentially be constructed on

land owned by Barry Stryker off Lowery Road. As you will remember, we are currently in the pre-application phase known as the 45-day notice period. This is the period before a potential full application to the Public Utility Commission (PUC) regarding a renewable energy project. If an application is submitted, Lowery Road Solar would be looking for a Certificate of Public Good to allow operation of the solar plant.

During the 45-day notice period, parties with standing can submit comments, letters of support or concerns. One letter could do it all. While the 45-day notice period is close to expiring, there is no requirement that a letter be submitted at all, but it certainly does not have to be done during that period.

The main reason for submitting a letter at this point is really to point out concerns. Because the full application hasn't been submitted, it is potentially easier to have changes made to the project to address those concerns. As long as the application hasn't been filed with the PUC, letters can still be submitted in a less formal manner. Of course, letters can still be submitted after the formal application is submitted, it is just easier to work with the developer prior to.

Mr. Hand noted that MHG Solar has developed 15 solar projects in Vermont. He stated during his joint presentation that the proposed project is located on a 30-acre parcel in what is currently a farm field. The project will utilize approximately 10,295 650-watt solar panels. The plant will connect to the Green Mountain Power grid using overhead power lines via an existing access road and then underground power lines through Mr. Stryker's field. Mr. Hand noted that the power company serving that area is Washington Electric Cooperative, Inc. but they are unable to utilize the electricity generated by the plant.

Mr. Hand also explained that this site was chosen because of the solar exposure, accessibility, limited visibility from surrounding areas, and minimal impacts on Natural Resources. Mr. Hand pointed out that the town will benefit from personal property tax. It should also be noted that part of this project is sited in the Town of Orange as well.

After the joint meeting, George Clain invited Mr. Stryker to the next Planning Commission meeting (this one) which rightfully so will include Mr. Hand as well. I do not expect another complete overview of the project.

DISCUSSION:

Mr. Sanborn read Mr. Violette's staff report as stated above. Mr. Hand provided a short summary of the project as it was presented to the Selectboard earlier in the month.

Highlights of discussion between Commission members, Mr. Hand, and Mr. Stryker:

- MHS Solar's project on Lowery Road is the largest
- Potential issues with waterfowl and solar panels
- Taxation of solar projects (State education tax, local government tax (personal) & municipal property tax)
- Different application requirements for net meter projects and mega projects
- Reviewing how power will go from the solar array to Lowery Road
- GMP requirements for taking over the 5MGkw power plant

- 2) Discuss the Lowery Road solar project and consider writing a letter of support or a letter with concerns or both.

Members reviewed its options from the previous discussion and concluded that it did not have any concerns to submit a letter at this time, since the project does not require a preferred site status.

Mr. Atwood left the meeting.

- 3) Continue discussion regarding forming an Energy Committee

Mr. Gilbar provided an overview of Williston's Energy Advisory Committee's structure:

- Proposed Charge
- Proposed Structure of Committee
- Organizational Meeting
- Committee Work Plan Items
- Create a budget
- Introduction to Act 174 Regional Municipal Energy Planning Standards
- Public Outreach "Getting Our Message Out"
- Public online through various social media platforms & online & print media
- Community Outreach Inventory

The consensus is to review the creation of an Energy Advisory Committee and review the town's Energy Plan.

F) FOLLOW UP

- 1) Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission

Mr. Clain reported that the interim Executive Director is Christian Meyer.

Mr. Clain and Mr. Gilbar expressed concerns the WCVEDD proposed a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy plan for regional economic development which would meet the current and anticipated economic challenges. They both are concern there is a strong influence with the larger counties and impact decision such as mandating the strategic plan in the regional plan and it would be mandated for all towns in their Town Plans, which would be taking away local control from the towns.

- 2) Status of Zoning Bylaw Amendments

Mr. Sanborn reported that the Selectboard has approved the amendments with changes to the definitions to cannabis to state the same as in State Statutes.

G) ROUND TABLE - None

H) ADJOURN!

On motion by Mr. Reil, seconded by Mr. Gilbar, the Planning Commission adjourned the meeting at 9:00 p.m. Vote 5-0-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Cindy Spaulding, Clerk

Cedric Sanborn, Chair

Mike Gilbar

George Clain

Byron Atwood

Chris Violette

Craig Chase

Terry Reil

DRAFT