

BARRE TOWN PLANNING COMMISSION

The Town of Barre Planning Commission held a meeting on Wednesday, December 16, 2020 beginning at 7:00 p.m. at the **Municipal Building**, 149 Websterville Road as well as by electronic means, Zoom video conference and teleconference.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Host Zoom: Chris Violette

Zoom: Mike Gilbar, Cedric Sanborn, Byron Atwood, and George Clain

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Charles Thygesen, Sr., and Deb Pierce

STAFF PRESENT:

Zoom Host: Chris Violette

Zoom: Cindy Spaulding

OTHERS PRESENT

Regan Howard and Valerie Vallerand (Merry Meadows, LLC), Alex Bravakis (Novus Energy Development) and Alice Farrell

1) **CHANGES TO THE AGENDA**

Mr. Sanborn called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

No changes to agenda

2) **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

On motion by Mr. Gilbar, seconded by Mr. Atwood, the Planning Commission approved the minutes of November 18, 2020 with corrections. Vote 5-0-0.

Mr. Violette announced Mr. Carr has rescinded his proposal to rezone property he owns at 6 Tanglewood Drive with road frontage on West Cobble Hill Road. The proposal was to change the zoning designation of this parcel from low density residential to high density residential.

3) **REVIEW POSSIBLE SOLAR SITING**

Presentation from Novus Energy regarding two solar projects in the Morrison Road area.

Mr. Violette announced that the Planning Commission had received a pre-application 45 day notice from Novus Energy to be filed with the Vermont Public Utility Commission. He invited members to attend a site visit to each site on December 17 at 3:00 p.m.

Mr. Bravakis provided an overview of both potential solar projects on land owned by Merry Meadows, LLC:

Project 1 Bridge Street

- 500 kW on 2.6 acres of land on a southerly slope
- Visibility is limited so there will less screening/plantings needed
- Land has no agricultural uses

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- Solar panels closer together
- Three-phase power will be underground from the power pole back to grid panel at the turnaround on site
- Follow existing access road
- Offering HP Hood

Project #2 – Allen Street

- 500 kW on 3.5 acres of land
- Panels will have a visual impact
- Class II -Wetlands
- Approaching HP Hood for net metering or to be used locally
- Visual mitigation with plantings and screening

Questions/Answers and Suggestions/Explanation (Note these are not a verbatim)

Q: Is there still a rule concerning proposed solar projects being in close proximity to existing ones.

A: The rule still exists. The exception is to present a case to support a separate solar array on the same property.

Q: What are sufficient plantings for screening?

A: Sufficient plantings are evergreens and flowering bushes that are deer resistant

Q: Are there any plans for distributing power from the Bridge Street project?

A: Not at this time. The permitting process takes several years, once the permit is in hand then typically there is a reach out to the local community: businesses and affordable housing units. Need to have these in place before moving forward with the project.

S: The Special Education Academy is currently under construction or a CO-OP.

E: There are two ways to create a CO-OP: buy a panel within the solar array or a pool of people to utilize the power and become new customers. The group of people must be large enough so if some drop out, there are enough to continue in the group to take the power for 25 years plus.

Q: Is the 500 kW a name plate?

A: Yes, it is an AC size.

Discussion: Name plate would not meet the goals for 2050.

Q: Do you know what this will generate for kWh in a year?

A: Approximately 800,000 kWh per year for each project. It depends upon the wattage of the module being used.

Q: What is the plan when it comes time to decommission the panels?

A: After twenty-five years, the plan is to restore the site to its original condition. Take everything out and recycle all materials that can be recycled. There may be an option after the 25 years, to sign a new lease and put new modules on the site as it already has the infrastructure.

Q: Will the access roads be maintained in the winter to access the panels for snow removal?

A: The snow eventually does slide off the panels. Snow removal has been reviewed and would not be cost effective.

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Q: What is being done to prevent erosion and sediment from the projects going into the Stevens Branch?

A: Most civil engineers conclude solar array would not increase the erosion contribute to erosion/sediment.

Discussion ensued concerning potential drainage problem, impervious surfaces and types of ground covering to be grass/pollination plantings, permitting process includes a section.

Q: Why is there fencing around the projects as it cuts off wildlife?

A: Fencing is required around solar arrays.

Q: Will there be local businesses used for the projects?

A: The businesses used for these projects are Vermont based.

Q: In the new permit process with the decommission plan be more detailed?

A: It possibly will have more in the plan, but not as detailed as PC may want it.

Discussion ensued concerning detailed decommission plans should be; Novus provide a boiler plate decommission plan for feedback and the potential to create a decommission fund.

At the January meeting Novus will be requesting a preferred site for both of the projects. The Commission will review the criteria for a preferred site.

4) **OTHER**

Discuss either possible Zoning Bylaws amendments based on Town Plan implementation suggestions or needed updates for various reasons.

Mr. Violette mentioned that Ms. Pierce has started reviewing existing zoning bylaws with edits. Discussion ensued regarding the Town Plan, Zoning Bylaws and ACT 179, Covenants in industrial parks, public input, demographics constantly need update, preferred site criteria for solar, and prioritize sections of the bylaws.

5) **FOLLOW UP**

CENTRAL VERMONT REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION RELATIONSHIP WITH THE TOWN

Highlights of Discussion

- Substantial Difference ruling on Act 248 project regarding, if there were a difference, regional could intervene with a different view.
- Differences with ACT 179, 248, or 250
- Concerns with differences of opinion or procedural on a local and regional level
- Planners given authority over local
- RPC a state agent or work for the municipalities
- Appeal process if there is a difference between local vs regional
- Language removed RPC's review committee bylaws: "At the request of the municipality"
- Welcome having a discussion with the Executive Director over concerns.

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6) **ROUND TABLE**

7) **ADJOURN!**

On motion by Mr. Gilbar, seconded by Mr. Atwood, the Planning Commission adjourned at 8:48 p.m. Vote 5-0-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Cindy Spaulding, Clerk

Cedric Sanborn, Chair

George Clain

Debra Pierce

Chris Violette

Michael Gilbar

Byron Atwood

Charles Thygesen, Sr.