

Town of Sharon, Vermont
Planning Commission
Minutes
June 11, 2019
(Final Corrections made SPC July 9, 2019)

Commissioners Present: Paul Kristensen, Peter Anderson, Sue Sellew, Ira Clark

Commissioners Absent: none

Staff Present: Margy Becker (taking minutes)

Visitors: Ken Davis, Norwich Technologies; Residents Steve Raymond, Kyle Gilbert, Chelsea May; Ryan Haac (Energy Committee), Joe Ronan (Selectmen)

Peter Anderson nominated Ira Clark as temporary chair to run the meeting. Paul Kristensen seconded. Motion carried. Ira Clark called the meeting to order at 7:42PM.

Minutes of May 14, 2019:

Motion by Paul Kristensen, second by Sue Sellew, to approve the minutes of May 14, 2019 without changes. The motion carried.

Norwich Technologies:

Kevin Davis of NT explained the Public Utility Commission's rule 5.100 pertaining to construction and operation of net-metering systems, which sets requirements for a 'preferred site letter' signed by both the regional and local planning commissions and Selectboard. The letter must accompany the application Norwich Technologies plans to submit in late June to the Public Utility Commission. The letter is needed in order to assure NT can receive beneficial net-metering rates. Net-metering rates are to increase July 1. NT's application is for a 500kW net-metered solar installation on Raymond Road.

Planning Commissioners expressed the sentiment that NT's request is premature, since the local enhanced energy planning process has not reached the point of identifying preferred sites. Kevin Davis stated this is mostly the case across the state.

Planning Commissioners acknowledged the existence of 3-phase power on Rte. 132 makes sites there more desirable.

Kevin Davis provided a copy of a sample preferred site letter, which is included in NT's 45-day notice of application packet. Peter Anderson inquired whether NT had met with the TRORC? Kevin Davis indicated the regional planning commission would be approached last.

Joe Ronan made the suggestion that the Town consider a preferred site letter based on certain conditions NT must meet for continued town support.

Sue Sellev inquired whether the decommissioning fund for the existing array on Rte. 132 had been funded. Joe Ronan stated no. The Selectboard will require a decommissioning plan and fund for the Raymond Road array as well.

Kevin Davis explained the Raymond Road array will benefit local GMP customers. The array is planning to power approximately 100 homes. Construction may take place in late 2020 or 2021 – as the PUC review process take some time.

Peter Anderson noted the State has established goals and ‘quotas’ for each town to achieve with respect to renewable energy generation. He inquired what percentage of the solar goal has already been met by the Sun Gen facility at the Commerce Park and the Rikert arrays?

Ira Clark explained the next step in energy planning is for Ryan Haac to meet with the SPC to review maps for preferred sites. Paul Kristensen inquired if a site is easy and accessible, would it be a ‘preferred site’?

Ryan Haac joins the meeting.

Ryan Haac stated the Energy Committee looks favorably upon the project. Ryan Haac indicated his recollection of revised information from the TRORC is the Town has approximately 4 megawatts of solar generation in place and have 3 to 4.5 megawatts remaining to meet the quota for solar (with goals of 7 to 8.4 MW). Thus the proposed Raymond Road solar array might provide 1/8th of that quota.

Kyle Gilbert and Chelsea indicated they have written comments to submit. They will be sent to the Selectboard. Kyle inquired whether the survey of wetlands on the site had resulted in changes to the layout of the array? Kevin Davis indicated the layout has changed as a result of the survey. Wetlands have to be avoided.

Kyle inquired whether NT planned to use pesticides to control the growth of vegetation? Kevin Davis responded NT customarily relies upon vegetative control via natural means – for example sheep grazing or brush hogging.

Steve Raymond expressed continued concerns about screening of the array. What entity decides if screening is adequate? The back side of panels will be seen from Rte. 132. Planning Commissioners expressed tentative conviction that screening could be achieved and that a detailed landscape plan could result from the PUC review process.

Ira Clark summarized the SPC’s concerns regarding the prematurity of the request for a preferred site letter. Ryan Haac explained the Energy Committee generally supports Rte. 132 sites as preferred sites. He noted that issuance of a preferred site letter at this time might be a good strategy to ensure the Town receives credit towards its solar quota.

Joe Ronan asked Kevin Davis whether the preferred site letter can have conditions?

Peter Anderson made the motion that the Planning Commission 1) generally supports the concept of the Raymond Road site as a location of a 'preferred site', and 2) that the Selectboard coordinate preparation of the 'preferred site letter' with possible conditions. Paul seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Planning Commissioners who are able agreed to attend the Selectboard meeting on June 17th to further discuss NT's request.

FY20 Municipal Planning Grant Application:

Victoria Littlefield (Tory) met with Commissioners to review the schedule for submission of a planning grant. The SPC would like to use the funds in support of technical assistance to complete revisions the existing town plan. The Plan expires in April. There was discussion about potential adoption of an 'interim' town plan, should revisions on a plan to be 'confirmed' by the TRORC not yet be complete. Commissioners requested that finalization of the Energy Chapter for the revised plan take precedence in the schedule of work activities.

Planning Commissioners noted that extra meetings will be needed in order to accomplish the work. TRORC will draft an application. The TRORC is also planning to provide the technical assistance required to complete plan revisions.

It was agreed a special meeting of the Development Review Board (DRB) will be scheduled for June 20, 2019.

Adjournment:

Peter Anderson made the motion to adjourn at 9:25PM. Paul Kristensen seconded. The motion carried.

Submitted by Margy Becker