

Minutes of Planning Board Meeting
Town of Whately
Town Offices Building, 4 Sandy Lane
May 30, 2017

Members Present: Don Sluter, Nicholas Jones, Sara Cooper, Helena Farrell
Members Absent: Judy Markland

Attending: Edward Farrick, 179 Christian Ln.; John Wroblewski, 29 Straits Rd.; Mike Bechta, 139 Christian Ln.; Jane Grybko, 213 Christian Ln.; Betty Arlaski, River Rd.; Gretchen Bechta, 139 Christian Ln.; Tony Wonseski and Kelley Fike, SVE Associates – Brattleboro, VT; Joseph and Mary Ellen Liseno, 197 River Rd.; (name illegible) and Joyce Irwin, 193 River Rd.; Diane Grybko, 13 Braeburn Rd., S. Deerfield; Julie Beauchemin and Chris Clark, Nexamp Inc., 4 Liberty Sq., Boston; Tom Lesser, 39 Main St., Northampton; Alan Seewald, Attorney for Long Plain Solar, 71 King St., Northampton

Call to Order, 7:10 p.m.
The meeting was not recorded.

I. NEW BUSINESS

PUBLIC HEARING – Site Plan Review
Long Plain Solar Facility

The secretary read the legal notice and the applicant agreed that it was accurate.

Tony Wonseski, of the engineering firm SVE Associates, submitted the following:

- a 5-page Electronically Recorded Document of the Franklin County Registry of Deeds, Bk: 07014 Pg: 55, noted by hand on page one, “Long Plain Solar Shared Access Agreement” and titled on page two, “EASEMENT”;
- A 5-page copy of the Decision rendered on 5/2/17 by the Whately Zoning Board of Appeals, granting a special permit to Long Plain Solar, LLC, to build its solar power generation facility on premises off Christian Lane (Map: 21, Parcel: 15)
- A 13-page document noted by hand on page one, “Long Plain Solar Recorded Order of Conditions from Whately Conservation Commission”
- 5 copies of a 13-page document describing a sound evaluation done by VHB of Watertown, MA, for the Long Plain Solar Array
- a revision of the project plans dated 5/30/2017

Mr. Wonseski placed the updated plans on an easel and presented an aerial view of the site, showing the Agricultural – Residential Zone 1 area, and the Agricultural – Residential Zone 2 area where the project is allowed to be built. Mr. Wonseski discussed the Conservation Commission’s Order of Conditions, including the project’s size (18.1 acres) and its access shared by the Farrick, Hutkoski, and Grybko families. Mentioning First Brook, Second Brook, and surrounding wetlands, he explained the drainage and said plans were designed to avoid disturbance of wetlands as much as possible. The project will involve about 7400 solar panels, he said, and fencing will consist of a 7-ft wooden fence, a 7-ft chain link fence, and a 7-ft fence covered with vinyl-covered, he said, showing where each will go. The original number of arborvitae trees has been increased, he said, and clumps of three trees each will be staggered to form a 15-ft buffer with a maximum height of 10 feet. Zoning and internal setbacks are satisfied, he said. Don stated his appreciation of the 3-tier clumping, explained that the Planning Board prefers a mix of plants, noting that arborvitae alone is boring and that it is more natural to put in more species of native trees. Tony Wonseski said they can work with a mix, but that all trees will be kept trimmed to the height of the fencing to prevent shading of the solar panels.

The only lighting will be a light for the sign bearing 24-hour emergency contact information. Mr. Wonseski explained that electrical cables will be placed underground to the east side of the driveway, where one of the 5 poles is located. He said 5 poles is the minimum number allowed, and explained what each pole holds. There are no hazardous materials involved, he said, and no herbicides will be used. Maintenance will consist of grass mowing and weed whacking 4 times a year. The noise analysis results meet the requirements, he said. Regarding driveway access, he mentioned the “strange lotting of the old days” and noted that today, lots couldn’t be divided the same way. Regarding the driveway, he said the project has a utility and access easement with Edward Farrick, and that the driveway narrows along the Grybko property, which has no easement.

Mr. Wonseski said there are no steep slopes – only gentle grading will be needed, and there will be erosion control. The field currently produces more runoff than it will produce after it is planted with a seed mixture; sediment traps will be used and then removed when the project is finished, he said. All prime soils will stay, and will allow the field to revert to agriculture at the end of the project’s life, he said. To secure the panels, he said, piles are driven, or a screw goes 4-ft into the ground. The Interconnect Agreement and other required documents have all been submitted, he said.

Julie Beauchemin, of Nexamp, Inc. described the project as “community shared”, using net metering credits that are sold to the town and its residents, and allow a 15% discount on electrical bills. She said that in addition to advertising this arrangement on its website, Nexamp will use phone calls, emails, and postings around town to inform residents. When asked whether Nexamp could also use direct mailing, she answered “Yes”.

The board mentioned that the town had not received the annual Fairview Farms solar project report, which is required to be sent to 8 or so town entities. Ms. Beauchemin explained that NRG now owns that project, but that Nexamp will own the Long Plain solar project. The board mentioned that Fire Chief John Hannum is concerned about having to fight fires with the electrical power on. Nexamp spokesman Chris Clark suggested throwing tarps over the panels involved, or throwing the switch to “off”, and letting the fire burn, noting that the amount of fuel is insignificant. Don explained that the Chief’s concern was for an incident like a car crash or a hot air balloon landing.

Don then opened the public comment portion of the hearing. Mike Bechta expressed surprise that the number of solar panels had still been given as “about 7400” at this stage. Regarding screening, he noted that deciduous trees on the east side would be nice, and that he would also like taller trees since 10-ft trees wouldn’t screen enough. Gretchen Bechta favored more mature arborvitae such as the recent planting at the elementary school. Tony Wonseski replied that plans call for 4-ft to 5-ft “starter” arborvitae that will be kept fence-high. Julie Beauchemin explained that a 10-ft tree would shade 30 feet of ground and interfere with panel power production. Asked about replacement of dead trees and about irrigation, Tony Wonseski said that there will be about a year of landscaping guarantee with the landscaping contractor, which for the last few projects has been Beauregard Construction. Asked about the timeline, he said there will be 3 months of heavy work, then the wait for the grass seed and plantings to grow, and the removal of sediment traps. He said to expect a period of about 9 months to pass before the project is complete. Asked about inspections for compliance, he said the project must follow the Conservation Commission’s Order of Conditions.

Don noted that since Nexamp is going to be the owner of the finished project, the town should have a liason with a Nexamp representative. Chris Clark replied that Nexamp’s Asset Management Services department will fill that role. Nicholas Jones confirmed with Nexamp that they are not landscape architects. Helena Farrell noted that the project’s engineering firm, SVE Associates, has a landscape architect, and that it would be good to consult on native plantings that won’t exceed 8 feet. When Sara Cooper asked whether there were any other comments from abutters about screening, Maryellen Lisano thanked the board for giving so much consideration to that topic.

At 8:02 pm Don closed the public comment portion of the hearing. He summed up these points: the Conservation Committed has signed off on the project, the Zoning Board of Appeals has granted the project a special permit, Highway Commissioner Keith Bardwell has no objection to it, the Historical Commission and the Health Department have no concerns, and Don will double-check with Fire Chief John Hannum.

Nicolas moved to accept the site plan,

- 1) Pending an acceptable planting schedule (Tony Wonseski will email this)
- 2) Pending approval by the Fire Chief
- 3) Pending receipt of a letter confirming both a Nexamp liason and direct mail notification of Whately residents about the 15% discount net metering credits

Helena seconded the motion, Don, Nicholas, and Helena all voted yes, Sara Cooper abstained, and the site plan was accepted.

II. OLD BUSINESS

1. Pine Plains Estates Lot Release

John Wroblewski submitted a blank certificate of performance and requested that the board approve the release of the remaining 16 lots at Pine Plains Estates. He stated that electrical power is available and that installation of cable, rain gardens, and grass along the sides of the roads has all been completed. The only item remaining is application of the final coat of paving, he said, and that will probably be done in the fall unless there is a reason to wait until spring. Nicholas moved to release the remaining 16 lots, Helena seconded the motion, and the board unanimously approved the release. Mr. Wroblewski left the room to ask Maryellen Cranston, who was in the building, to notarize the signing of the Certificate of Performance, which she did.

2. Farm Brewery Discussion

The board discussed Town Counsel's opinion regarding farm breweries. Don will re-draft the letter to Building Inspector Jim Hawkins and will email it to the board for approval.

3. Smith ANR (in preparation for APR)

The board reviewed an 8½" x 11" plan of the land involved, to advise Mr. Smith about frontage requirements.

III. Multi Department Joint Planning for Possible Zoning Updates – Discussion

The board discussed the Town of Conway's new bylaw re: allowing housing for the elderly that Whately currently doesn't allow (55 and older is the usual), and the possibility of changing Whately's zoning regulations to stay in advance of the aging population.

IV. Request for Waiver of Site Plan Review for Town Offices

The board discussed the rental of storage space in the rear of the Town Offices, which has been proposed to be done soon, in an expedited manner. Nicholas moved to waive the site plan review, Sara seconded the motion, and the board voted unanimously to waive site plan review.

V. Other

There were no other items.

5.

VI. Approval of the Minutes of April 18, 2017

Sara moved to approve the minutes as amended, Nicholas seconded, and the board voted unanimously to approve the minutes as amended.

V. Planning Board Mail

The board reviewed the mail.

VI. Next Meeting Date

June 27, 2017 (if needed)

VII. Adjourn

Don adjourned the meeting at 9:30 pm

Documents reviewed (kept in the Planning Board files)

1. A large-format, multi-page plan of the project, labeled:

SPECIAL PERMIT AND SITE PLAN REVIEW FOR LONG PLAIN SOLAR ARRAY

The plan was originally dated 06-MAR-17 in the lower right corner.

To the left of that date is a revisions list signed by Anthony Wonseski on 5-30-17 that shows the following:

The letter B marked within a triangle, and the words,
“Revised per shared access agreement 06-APR-17”

The letter C marked within a triangle, and the words,
“Revised per municipal permitting process 30-MAY-17”

2. An 8½" x 11" plan of land located on Long Plain Road, dated May 25, 2017, prepared by The Berkshire Group, Inc., for Richard E., Robert F., William J. Smith & The Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources

Mary McCarthy,
Secretary
Planning Board
Town of Whately