

**FRANKLIN PLANNING BOARD
PUBLIC HEARING MEETING
May 22, 2019
6:00 p.m.**

Minutes

Call to Order:

☐ Pledge of Allegiance

☐ Roll Call: Present—Brian Barry, Jo Brown, Christine Dzujna, Tim Flaherty, Chairman Dave Liberatore, Tim Stangroom, & Donna Tully. Also present: Planning Director Richard Lewis
Absent: Mayor Tony Giunta, Kathy Lauer-Rago, & David Testerman

☐ Approval of April 24, 2019 Planning Board Minutes: Members Brown/Dzujna motioned/seconded approval of the minutes. Member Stangroom pointed out a number of typos, which were acknowledged by the board members. The minutes, including all corrections were approved by a vote of 7-0-0.

New Business:

P 19-06: William & Christina Hamel, owners and Colin Brown, Agent, request a conceptual review and discussion for a proposed subdivision of property located at 175 Lawndale Avenue [map/lot 097-093-00, map sheet N7] in the R-2 [High-Density Residential] zoning district. A final subdivision review will be held on June 26, 2019 at 6:00 pm.

Planner Lewis announced that some easement issues were discovered by the owner's surveyor. The Hamels have elected to withdraw their application for subdivision until those issues have been resolved. When they choose to proceed, notification will be sent out.

Old Business:

P19-05: Sun Development Group, LLC / General Properties, LLC, owners and GSSG New Hampshire, LLC, applicant, are seeking Site Plan approval to install a 3-megawatt solar panel array on approx. 13 acres of abutting properties [147-404-00 & 147-051-00, Map Sheet L9 & M9] between 293 Sanborn Street and Duffy & Mark Streets in the R1/RS [Low Density Residential/Single Family Residential] zoning districts.

Naomi Praul from Nobis Engineering and Clarke Fenner, Co-Founder of New England Solar Garden Corporation, were present to speak about the application and answer any questions from the Board and the public. Ms. Praul mentioned the technical review committee meeting that took place on May 6th, which included a discussion of screening, clearing, vegetation, mowing around the panels, and the quality of installation, as well as the solar array and emergency access. Following up that meeting, a site walk took place on May 8th that included several members of the Planning Board, along with Planning Director Richard Lewis, Ms. Praul and Andrew Keller. That site walk focused on screening concerns, particularly with the openness of some of the vistas on abutting residential properties. On the revised

plans, sheet C-2.1 shows the upper portions of the array and the orange hatched area on the western side represents very open views. To provide some privacy, they are proposing to install privacy slats in the chain link fencing. That area is marked with a green line on the plans. Sheet C-2.2 shows the southern boundary and again they are proposing the vinyl slats in the fencing. Some clearing was done prior to the current ownership. They are looking at filling in some of those open areas with vegetation, in addition to the slats in the security fence. The updated plan shows 8'-10' tall evergreen trees and a note indicates that the final location of those trees will be decided after the array is up and the screening deficiencies have been evaluated. In the solar panel array, all tree stumps and tree debris will be totally removed and grass will be planted. That grass will be cut 2-3 times a year. Along the fence line the stumps will remain in place, but all woody debris will either be chipped and placed on the ground, or removed from the site. Following discussions with the Fire Department, it has been agreed to install a locked gate on Duffy Street that will allow access to the site by emergency vehicles only. Both of the gated access points (off the Foundry site and off Duffy Street) will be provided with SuperSafe lock boxes. On the previous plan, an overhead electrical wire was shown in the array area. That was erroneous. The overhead electrical wire coming in from the Foundry area will end at the security fence and go underground into the array area. Due to public concerns about the noise level of the array operation, the Board was supplied with a handout that shows different levels of noise and their equivalents to everyday objects. According to the handout, solar panels create less than 50 decibels of noise, which is comparable to the amount of sound a listener hears from a large electrical transformer at a distance of 100 feet. Copies were handed out to the public attendees.

Chairman Liberatore asked about the privacy slats. Ms. Praul said the slats are a dark green vinyl that feed diagonally through the chain link. Member Flaherty asked about the height of the fence and Ms. Praul said that it would be 7 feet tall, which is a code requirement based on the voltage of the array. Member Stangroom asked about the noise level, specifically how long the adjustments of the panels last and how often those adjustments take place. Mr. Fenner stated that the noise is generated during the day when the power is being converted from direct current to alternating current. It is a constant noise during the day. In the past, a large solar array used a central converter where all power was being converted by one central converter. Such converters required a great deal of cooling, which increased the noise associated with that system. The string converters that will be used on this installation, convert the power from a hundred panels instead of 5000 panels at one time, so the noise is less than an air conditioner. At this time of the year, although the noise would begin about 5 o'clock in the morning, the location of these string converters will be in the center of the array so they are several hundred feet away from the abutting properties. Member Stangroom asked about solar glare off the panels. Mr. Fenner stated that solar glare was a problem with the older panels that had aluminum frames that reflected the light. This is not the case with the newer panels.

Member Flaherty asked for clarification about the time the inverters start making noise. Mr. Fenner stated that it starts about 5 a.m. when the sun comes up, peaks in the middle of the day and then shuts off at sunset.

Member Dzujna asked about the timeline for the project. Mr. Fenner said there is a lot of push to get this into operation as soon as possible because the end of 2019 marks the end of the federal investment tax credits for solar. Currently that tax credit is 30 percent, but at the end of the year it will go down to the standard industrial credit of 10 percent. Their goal is to start construction as soon as they get approval from the utility. The applications have been submitted. This project does not trigger a transmission study, so if they start construction in September, it should be in production by the end of the year. Member Stangroom asked how long the whole process will take. Mr. Fenner estimated that

the tree cutting could be accomplished in less than two weeks. The stumping would take about three weeks to a month. The next noisy part is driving the posts into the ground and that would take about 3-4 weeks utilizing two large machines working during normal business hours. After that the noise is over. From there on, it is just assembly. Member Tully asked about photos of what the project will look like when finished. Mr. Fenner said they could supply some photos of similar projects.

Planner Lewis asked about the State permits. Mr. Fenner said that the permits go through Eversource and they have already submitted the interconnect application and received the system impact study agreement and have paid that bill. The process to approve this application takes about three to four months and they have just started that now. Eversource is currently figuring out the cost to New England Solar Garden Corporation to either upgrade the lines or the substation, or whatever is necessary. Eversource has already passed their electrical design.

Member Stangroom said that it was noted during the site visit that there are some gaps in the stone walls and asked if it were possible to move some of the stones that create the internal stone wall to close up that gap. Planner Lewis didn't think there were any restrictions to doing that and Ms. Praul answered that they could consider moving the stones.

Public Comment:

Tracy McBey, 243 Kendall Street, remarked that in the New England climate vinyl privacy slats don't hold up well. Mr. Fenner indicated that the state of the slats would be part of the overall maintenance of the site, but that a condition could be added to the agreement to address that. He went on to say that this would be a costly project, but that it will generate money for the town.

Robert Soboslai, 38 Dearborn Street, asked about the noise created during the stumping. He stated that two months of solid noise would be unbearable for his wife and mother-in-law. Mr. Fenner answered that the construction noise would be from about 8 am to 5 pm. He added that the pounding of the stakes for approximately a month is less intrusive than nail guns employed for months or years on a normal residential development.

Maureen Farmer said that she got the impression at the previous meetings that the stumps were being left. Mr. Lewis answered that the notes on the original plan were a little confusing. The stumps where the panels will go are being totally removed. The other stumps will remain in the setback area and the wetlands. Ms. Farmer asked about the increase in water flow if the stumps are removed. She stated that her sump pump works 24 hours a day and added that everyone knows that there is a major water problem up there. Ms. Praul said that the retention ponds would handle the surface water. Ms. Farmer said that it is the ground water that concerns her. She added that the ground water flow has increased substantially since the trees were removed. She asked for assurance that the ground water problem won't increase with the installation of the solar array. Member Brown reminded Ms. Farmer that the cutting of the trees wasn't done by the current applicant. Ms. Farmer said that by removing the stumps, it would get worse. Member Brown said that no one can control the ground water, but that with more vegetation added, along with the retention ponds, she thought the situation would probably get better. Ms. Praul said that they look at storm water runoff and the retention ponds are being designed to handle that; however, she can't guarantee an improvement in the ground water issue; that is something they don't typically look at.

Chairman Liberatore stated that the Mark and Duffy Streets residential project started back in the seventies and eighties. There were plans to develop fifty more lots in the area where the solar project is proposed, but that didn't happen due to the water runoff issue. The Chairman reiterated that the stumps will remain in the wetland area, retention ponds will be dug and more vegetation will be planted. The stumps being removed are where the panels will be installed. Member Flaherty added that the grass should also help out. Chair Liberatore asked Ms. Praul if they didn't have to go through a review with the State about the water problems, and Ms. Praul answered that the State permit is for stormwater and erosion control and that the detention ponds will help with those issues and potentially help a bit with the ground water runoff. Brian Barry, Deputy Director of Municipal Services, said that if the situation worsens after the installation of the panels, the city would address it and look at putting in more drainage to curb some of that problem. He explained that the area contains ledge, which forces water up to the surface. Another basin was installed on Mark Road and more basins could be put in to help direct the water. Mr. Barry said that when water runs out into the street in the winter and ices up, it becomes a city problem. He feels that the retention ponds and the added vegetation are going to help the situation.

Pat Simpson, 59 Mark Road, said that she'd been up to the solar project off Industrial Park Drive and asked how this solar project will look upon completion. She wondered if there were similar installations in the State that she could look at. Mr. Fenner said that he would give her an address to another installation. She went on to ask about the size of the panels. Mr. Fenner said that this design is a single axis tracking system. There is only a single panel instead of multiple panels, so the total height is only about 8 feet. Member Dzujna asked if there might be some photos online that people can look at. Upon further consideration, Mr. Fenner said that the solar site in Milton he was thinking of wasn't a single axis tracking system, but it too was only one panel high. Ms. Simpson said that what she wants to see is a system like the one proposed here so she can assess the noise levels and see how the panels look in place. Mr. Fenner told her that the noise level would be the same and added that the Milton site is comprised of about 4,000 panels (1 megawatt). Ms. Simpson mentioned the number of panels proposed for this site and Mr. Fenner agreed that it would more than two times the number at the Milton site.

Ms. Simpson went on to ask about the detention pools and whether they drain off or if the water just pools there. Ms. Praul stated that the water collects in them and then it sits in there for a period of time before being slowly released via a pipe. Ms. Simpson asked where that pipe drains and Ms. Praul answered that it drains into the wetlands on the solar property. Ms. Simpson asked about restrictions on wetlands and Chairman Liberatore stated that the solar company would need to meet all state and federal regulations.

George Dzujna asked if there wasn't some sort of vegetation that would suck up more water and wondered if the applicants could look into that. Mr. Barry said that willows and some grasses, once established, would draw up a lot of water.

Ms. McBey asked if the big trees at the end of her lot could be saved from cutting. Ms. Praul indicated that there is a ten-foot buffer planned at the rear of Ms. McBey's property, at 243 Kendall Street. Member Brown asked if those specific trees couldn't be marked against being cut down because it sounds like they are in the buffer zone. Ms. Praul agreed that that could be done.

With no additional public comment, Chairman Liberatore closed the public session and brought the discussion back to the board.

Planner Lewis asked for confirmation that someone from Nobis or the project team would go out and flag the trees behind Ms. McBey's house, in addition to providing some photographs of similar projects. He also asked for some photographs showing what the fence would look like. Once the Planning Office got those, they could be posted on the website to allow public access. Planner Lewis then informed both the Board and the public present that the hearing would be continued to the next meeting on June 26th. By early next week, he would start on a draft decision for the Board to consider, which would include things such as land clearing, stumping and maintenance plans. Any memos that get generated by the Planning Office will be available for public review at the office.

A motion to continue to the June 26th meeting was made by Member Dzujna and seconded by Member Brown. Chairman Liberatore said that looking at the timeline, a draft decision would be presented at the June 26th meeting providing all the items the Board has requested are provided in a timely manner. **The motion passed by a vote of 7-0-0.**

Public Comment: None

Other Business: None

Planner's Update: None

Adjournment: Members Brown/Dzujna motioned for adjournment at 7:05 pm. All were in favor.

- The next Planning Board regular meeting is scheduled for June 26, 2019 at 6:00 p.m. and the application dead line date is June 5, 2019.

Minutes recorded by Cheryl Y. Fisher, Administrative Assistant Planning & Zoning