

**CENTRAL VERMONT REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION
PROJECT REVIEW COMMITTEE
JUNE 21, 2018
MINUTES**

The regular meeting of the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission's Project Review Committee was held on Thursday, June 21, 2018 in the Conference Room of the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission.

Committee Members Present:

Janet Shatney –	Barre City, Vice-Chair
Laura Hill-Eubanks –	Town of Northfield
Gerry D'Amico –	Town of Roxbury, Alternate
Byron Atwood –	Town of Barre Town

Committee Members Absent:

John Brabant –	Town of Calais
Bob Wernecke –	Town of Berlin

Others Present:

Jamie Stewart –	Central Vermont Economic Development Corporation
Alex Bravakis –	Novus Energy Development
Michael Curtis –	Washington County Mental Health
Troy McBride –	Norwich Solar Technologies
Clare Rock –	CVRPC Senior Planner
Bonnie Waninger –	CVRPC Executive Director
Eric Vorwald, AICP –	CVRPC Senior Planner

CALL TO ORDER

At 4:06pm, without a quorum, Ms. Shatney initiated discussion of the agenda. The meeting began with introductions from the Committee members and the public.

CHANGES OR AMENDMENTS TO THE AGENDA

Ms. Shatney noted that item 3, election of officers would be moved after item 6 in order to provide adequate time for discussion with the representatives of the projects that were present.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

No public comments were offered.

Mr. Atwood arrived at 4:11pm to make a quorum. With a quorum present, Ms. Shatney officially called the meeting to order.

DISCUSSION & DETERMINATION OF REQUESTS FOR PREFERRED SITING UNDER PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION NET METERING RULES

Mr. Vorwald introduced the item and noted that this was related to discussions that occurred at the previous meeting. He began with a brief overview of the preferred siting discussion and asked if there were any questions about the background of the requests. With no clarifying questions, Mr. Vorwald noted that three requests had been received for preferred siting as outlined in the net metering rules, specifically noting the requests were being sought under item 7 where a preferred site could be designated through a joint letter from the municipal elected body and the municipal and regional planning commissions. He also noted that the Board of Commissioners took action directing the Project Review Committee to use the adopted, but not yet effective regional plan to evaluate these requests. Mr. Vorwald provided a brief overview of the three requests and noted that two requests were from Norwich Solar on adjacent properties in Barre Town.

Following Mr. Vorwald's review, Troy McBride, Norwich Solar Technologies, provided a more detailed overview of the two 500 kW sites they are working on and requesting preferred siting. Mr. McBride noted the location, the size of the systems, location of existing infrastructure, and other specific details. He also provided information regarding the financing and possible impacts to the change in the net metering rules may have regarding the reduction in incentives.

Following Mr. McBride's overview a robust discussion among the Committee members and the applicant ensued. Specific topics discussed were related to agricultural soils, wetlands, environmental features, financial impacts, how preferred siting was being defined by the applicant, and other topics. Mr. Atwood provided an overview of the discussion with the Barre Town Planning Commission noting that they conducted a site visit and had discussions with the applicant. He also noted that Barre Town had voted to identify these projects as preferred sites.

Additional discussion occurred regarding the process that the applicant has engaged in. It was noted that Norwich Solar submitted their 45 day advanced notices for their two projects and need the preferred siting designation to submit the full application. Mr. Vorwald noted that the full application would include all the additional site detail, environmental analysis, and other specific information. He also noted that if the full petition was filed, the Project Review Committee would have a chance to review the request again and provide comments based on the additional information.

After additional discussion, Ms. Shatney asked if there were any other comments. With no additional comments, Mr. D'Amico noted that he was not comfortable with the process since there was no criteria for the committee to evaluate the request, but this was the task they were charged with. With that said, he made a motion to approve both requests by Norwich Solar (Grandview Solar, LLC and Beckley Hill Solar, LLC) as preferred sites based on the information provided at this time. Mr. Atwood seconded the motion. With no additional discussion, the Committee voted 3 – 1 to approve the motion.

Next, Alex Bravakis, Novus Energy Development, provided an overview of his projects. He stated that the Town of Washington approached his company about developing solar projects on land that was owned by the Town. He noted that the information he provided included two projects. One was a 150 kW project on an existing landfill and therefore did not need preferred siting designation from the Region since it is already located on a preferred site. He indicated that this was being provided for informational purposes in context with the overall project.

Mr. Bravakis then provided an overview of the second project noting that it is a 500 kW site on land owned by the Town of Washington. He provided details on the geography of the property noting that there was only one neighbor in the vicinity and that the land was wet on one end therefore not ideal for farming. He stated that the Town had been given the land and they had tried to find a productive use of it, which is why they approach his company. Mr. Bravakis indicated that he was not trying to have these projects come in before the July 1st change in incentives under the net metering rules and had not yet filed his 45 day Advanced Notice on the projects. He stated that he wanted to establish the preferred siting designation before committing the additional resources to the project. Finally, he noted that letters from both the Washington Selectboard and Planning Commission were included indicating support of the projects.

The Committee continued with discussions of the project asking questions of the applicant including issues related to environmental constraints and other siting questions. At the end of this discussion, Mr. Atwood made a motion that the CVRPC Project Review Committee approve preferred siting designation for the 500 kW solar project in the Town of Washington based on the information presented. Mr. D'Amico seconded the motion. Ms. Shatney then asked for any discussion.

During the discussion, there was concern raised regarding the rural nature of the property and the impacts this development may have. It was noted that the Department of Public Service, in their guidance, classifies a 500 kW solar project as commercial scale. Ms. Hill-Eubanks indicated that the Regional Plan discourages commercial development in rural areas therefore compatibility may be an issue. Mr. Atwood noted that the project was supported by the Town of Washington as a way to use a town-owned property that is otherwise providing a benefit to the community.

Mr. D'Amico asked if the request could be tabled for a month in order to have additional information provided that could assist the Committee in their decision. Mr. Bravakis asked what additional information could be provided. It was noted that more information on the environmental conditions may aid in making a determination. Mr. Atwood noted that he was uncomfortable telling the Town of Washington that they couldn't use the land for energy development. He noted that the property had three phase power, the development was located to avoid wet areas, there were no views being impacted, it was supported by the town, the infrastructure was in place, the land is generally unusable, the property was south facing, and the town would retain the land at the end of the project life. Ms. Hill-Eubanks noted that she would like to see planning from the town in place before providing the preferred site designation.

Following this discussion Ms. Shatney noted that a motion was made and seconded and asked if there was any other discussion. With none indicated she called for the vote on the motion to designate the 500 kW project as a preferred site. The vote was 2 – 2 therefore it failed due to lack of support.

Following the vote, additional discussion occurred regarding Mr. Bravakis coming back to the Committee in July and what additional information may help with the evaluation of the project beyond what had already been provided. There was also discussion on what the timeline was for Mr. Bravakis to move forward with the project. He indicated that he would like to file his 45 day advanced notice by August therefore would like to know if the project will receive a determination in the next month. Additional discussion occurred regarding when the Committee may have criteria that could be used. Ms. Waninger noted that they may have general information for next month, but the discussion would be initiated by the Regional Plan Committee therefore final criteria may take several months to be approved. With no additional discussion, Ms. Shatney thanked everyone for participating.

REVIEW OF APPLICATIONS & PETITIONS THAT MAY QUALIFY FOR SUBSTANTIAL REGIONAL IMPACT & UPDATE ON PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS

Mr. Vorwald stated that a list of applications that had been submitted since the last meeting was included in the agenda packet. He provided an overview of the projects and highlighted several specific items.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Ms. Shatney asked for nominations of a Committee Chair. Ms. Hill-Eubanks nominated Ms. Shatney as chair which was seconded by Mr. D'Amico. With no other nominations, Ms. Shatney called for a vote which was 3 – 0 in favor of the motion. Next, Ms. Shatney, called for nominations of a vice-chair. Ms. Shatney nominated Mr. Atwood, which was seconded by Mr. D'Amico. With no other nominations, Ms. Shatney called for a vote which was 3 – 0 in favor of the motion.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mr. D'Amico made a motion to approve the May 31, 2018 minutes with corrections noted. The motion was seconded by Mr. Atwood. With no further discussion, the Committee voted 3 – 0 in favor of the motion to approve the May 31, 2018 minutes with corrections.

ADJOURNMENT

With business concluded, Ms. Shatney called for a motion to adjourn which was offered by Ms. Hill-Eubanks and seconded by Mr. Atwood. The vote was 4 – 0 in favor of the motion and the meeting was adjourned at 6:30pm.