

CENTRAL VERMONT REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

Project Review Committee

August 17, 2023 4:00pm

Remote Participation via Zoom

Minutes

Project Review Committee Members

x	Lee Cattaneo, Orange Commissioner	1
x	John Brabant, Calais Commissioner	2
	Bill Arrand, Worcester Commissioner	3
	Peter Carbee, Washington Commissioner	4
x	Robert Wernecke, Berlin Commissioner	5
x	Ron Krauth, Middlesex	6

7

8 Staff: Clare Rock (present in person), Sam Lash

9

10 Guests: Henry Amistadi, Duxbury; Alan Quackenbush, Duxbury Rep; Geoff Martin, Norwich Solar;
11 Martha Staskus, Norwich Solar (on the phone.)

12

13 L. Cattaneo called the meeting to order at 4:09pm

14

15 Public comment

16 No public comments

17

18 Adjustments to the Agenda

19 None

20

21 Public Comment

22 No members of the public

23

24 Act 250 / Section 248 Applications & Projects of Substantial Regional Impact

25 a) Consider significant regional impact and conformance with regional plan for the following
26 projects:

27

28 Geoff Martin, Norwich Solar gave an intro to the project. And referred to the information contained
29 within the packet.

30

31 Staff gave the brief overview and also referenced in the information contained in the packet.

32

33 R Krauth made a motion to write a Preferred Site Designation Letter for the site, seconded by J Brabant.
34 All in favor. Motion carried.

35

36 Ron Krauth asked about any concerns of the neighbors, there were none, the Town reached out to
37 neighbors when they selected the project developer.

38

1 **Preferred Sites Process**

2 C Rock introduced the topic and handed it over to S Lash who summarized the memo in the packet.

3
4 Discussion included recent rate increase by Washington Electric and recognition that there is a
5 mismatch between state renewable energy programs and renewable energy standards. The programs
6 (net-metering and the now ended standard offer programs) actually pre-dated the existence of the
7 standards, this is one of the motivations behind the comprehensive update- first to the standards, and
8 then to policies and programs that is currently ongoing. Programs and policies, as well as DUs, can play a
9 significant role in determining how and WHO feels the benefits and burdens of implementing the
10 standards set. Sam is a member of the Stakeholder Advisory Group supporting the Technical Analyses of
11 Tier I and Tier II of the Renewable Energy Standards; furthermore, CVRPC and the other RPCs will be
12 working with the Public Service Department to conduct community engagement to inform the updates-
13 all are invited to participate and to take an active role in encouraging community members to
14 participate (more info to come!).

15
16 Discussion about the renewable energy standard and the need to support rural ratepayers in the
17 development of the programs and policies that are used to meet the standards, as well as how to ensure
18 DUs have the capacity, support, and vision to meet region's needs. Noted that WEC is one of three DUs
19 that has not been obligated to meet Tier II (local generation) requirements due to status as 100%
20 renewable when standards were created based on VT statute (although still had to support net-
21 metering and standard offer programs).

22
23 There was recognition that historically energy generation projects are not co-located with storage which
24 should be a critical aspect of new project to encourage local co-benefits (stand alone or within a
25 community benefit agreement). Comment was made that recent projects are going on to "easy"
26 locations (cleared and open farm fields) vs brownfields and sites which need reclamation. These latter
27 sites should be prioritized and are already included in state definition of preferred sites. Regional
28 preference needs to be clearer on this, in addition, do we deter green fields or maximize local co-
29 benefits (or both)?

30
31 Concern about the mining impacts in other countries raised, and the need to be thoughtful about all the
32 impacts unlike the development & implementation of fossil fuel infrastructure- how do we ensure we
33 [rapidly] move away from the status quo without repeating the environmental, social, health, and
34 economic damage especially to existing frontline communities. This is a key motivation behind the
35 emphasis on local generation and storage which rightly should consider the full life cycle.

36
37 Regarding projects on farm fields, CPG's are issued for 25 years, this doesn't mean the projects will be
38 removed and the field will be reverted back to its natural state after 25 years. This only means the
39 permit expires and can be renewed. Agricultural soils are a current possible constraint not a preferred
40 site, nor are they being considered to be listed as a preferred site. Instead, the thinking of the "dual-land
41 use" and "community benefit agreement", and construction method criteria as potential preferred sites
42 qualifiers in the memo is: while brownfields, capped landfills, rooftop, etc. still remain as preferred sites,
43 IF a project (as has been the trend in our region and across the state) is proposed in green fields,
44 providing a list of criteria that could be met to qualify it as a preferred site would substantially improve
45 the local benefits of the types of projects we are already seeing in our region and encourage local co-
46 project development (in other words, instead of prohibiting wholesale the siting on agricultural lands we
47 could take the approach of ensuring projects that are sited on agricultural soils are taking the model of
48 or are co-developed with local communities and working lands sectors to maximize local benefits,

1 support sustainability of working lands (economic and changing climate conditions), and minimize
2 negative impacts).

3
4 There is a need to maximize parking lots (solar canopies which can also support future electrification in
5 transportation), such as the parking lot behind the Capitol Plaza Hotel. It not a great idea to put parking
6 lots in floodplains but solar installations could withstand some floodwaters.

7
8 Regarding placing the new projects in areas that have experienced outages (as identified in the memo),
9 question was raised about how CVRPC would ensure that these new projects would indeed stay on line
10 as the other components of keeping “the lights on” are outside the control of one project location. The
11 potential preference for siting DERs where reliability is lowest is to enable and encourage co-developed
12 community/municipal projects that would improve grid reliability at the community level (vs residential
13 per se) and support communities during outages by continuing to generate and store energy locally, as
14 well as, focus potential investments in infrastructure such as expansion of three-phase power,
15 establishment of micro-grid program, etc. where it is needed most which in the longer term then begins
16 to meet individual by individual needs.

17
18 The direct pay option associated with IRA clean energy tax credits fundamentally changes the role
19 municipalities (as well as other levels of government, schools and nonprofits) can play in developing
20 energy resilience and equity via municipally and/or community owned/developed projects and
21 infrastructure (subsidized by 10-40% through Clean Energy “Tax” Credits). CVRPC has been supporting
22 municipalities with project development (e.g. municipal solar webinars on site selection tools, on project
23 workflow and process, grant narratives and project scopes, etc.) but could play an expanded role in
24 aggregating projects, procurement, etc. to ensure co-benefits (including financial) are maximized locally.
25 General support expressed for community solar and vision of municipal role in develop and owning
26 projects with technical and funding support. Full circle back to the meeting prompt “what kind of
27 projects do we WANT to see and NEED in our communities” and ensuring preferred siting is intentionally
28 and specifically promoting those.

29
30 Noted for some, next steps would include more specific metrics/numeric components, generally more
31 specificity (but not necessarily restriction) in preferred sites and process of determination, is a desired
32 outcome with regional plan update.

33 34 **Adjournment**

35
36 *R. Wernecke made a motion to adjourn. Seconded by J Brabant. All in favor. So moved.*