

**Town of Hinesburg
Planning Commission
December 9, 2015
Approved 12/16**

Members Present: Dennis Place, Maggie Gordon, Aaron Kimball, Joe Iadanza, James Donegan, Rolf Kielman, Jeff French.

Members Absent: Russell Fox, Kyle Bostwick.

Also present: Alex Weinhagen (Director of Planning & Zoning) and Freeda Powers (Recording Secretary).

Public Present: Chuck Reiss.

Joe I. chaired the meeting, which was called to order at 7:34pm.

Agenda Changes: There were no changes to the agenda. There were no public comments for non-agenda items.

Review of Draft Letters to Public Service Board (PSB) re: Solar Array Proposals: Ct'd from 11/25

The Board reviewed the two draft letters for the PSB regarding solar array proposals. The Board felt the letters accurately reflected their discussion and approved of the drafts.

Solar Array Screening Standards: The Board reviewed the first draft of the solar array screening standards. Joe I. noted that Clause #1: Commercial Development, was meant to cover all town zones. Alex W. noted that this is already addressed in Section 5.6 (Commercial & Industrial Design Standards). He suggested the Board could move that language from Clause #1 to the definition section and reword Section 5.6 to cover all. Jeff F. asked about a hypothetical large lot in the Residential District? Joe I. said the intent is to have it apply equally across the town. Clause #2: Size/Trigger is still up for discussion, but the draft language suggests .25 acre.

Alex W. asked about the term "view shed" in the draft, what exactly does the Board mean by this term? Aaron K. explained that this term, as well as "view finder" were terms to facilitate discussion. They were spurred by Bill Marks' comments regarding impacts to his view from his home. Alex W. reminded the Board that current regulations discuss views from public roads, not from private properties. If this is not part of residential development, he said, why apply it to solar projects? There was some discussion about the scale within a view as it relates to visual impact and ability of projects to be absorbed adequately by their surroundings. Joe I. said the general consensus seems to be that to be in the view is not offensive, but to block a view is.

The Board discussed setbacks as a way to lessen that visual impact as well. The solar panels by Green Street were noted as a poor example, with little screening, very little setbacks; you are at times seeing the back side of solar panels nearly the size of billboards. This, compared to the solar array on the north side of Charlotte Road which have a very good setback from the road.

Rolf K. said a percentage basis can be a valid application (i.e., viewshed idea) if the “lense”/view is filled by a certain proportion, a project is denied. There are places where this type of analysis are applied, he said.

Maggie G. reminded the rest of the Commissioners that screening is the topic tonight, that we have a small window of opportunity to get some language in place. Joe I. acknowledged this point.

Dennis P. said he personally feels that there are too many differences between Renewable Energy projects and what we typically see in Commercial development. In his opinion, we should keep Section 5.6 as it is and there should be a separate section to address renewable energy. Joe I. replied that Clause #3b, regarding screening, does not say screening must *hide* it, it says *break up the visual impact*. Aaron K. said in response to Dennis, in his view, the most significant difference is in that this is a utility vs. commercial use.

Chuck R. said the Board should be considering the sheer coverage in solar array projects, and remember that by comparison, most residential development will be talking about .25 acre or less. This led Maggie G. to ask, how did we come to .25 acre in the draft language. Joe I. said 10,000 sq. ft. is not a small area, and we wanted this graduated (thus Clause 3b), we wanted something more than most development would create with a single structure. The Board looked at the state language for reference.

Jeff F. asked, do we know if the state has the power to force adjoining property owners to, say, cut down trees if they are shading a solar array project? Chuck R. said that is unlikely. He said in his experience, they estimate the tree growth pattern and place arrays accordingly.

James D. considered expressing characteristics (i.e. reflectivity). Alex W. said he likes the coverage laid out in the draft language. He said he feels that it should be tweaked a bit for the Village Growth Area but overall he feels it works elsewhere. He said he feels that applying the same screening to commercial and renewables would be very difficult in the Village Growth Area.

Rolf K. wondered, does anyone feel that the land in the Village Growth Area is too valuable to be considered for solar array projects? Joe I. said no, not necessarily. Jeff F. said if the Town is out of wastewater capacity, landowners may be more inclined to consider this option for their land use. The Board reviewed Section 5.6.5 and the possibility of simply adding solar arrays to this language. The Board liked the language referring to maintenance in 4.3.8 and might add it to the language in Section 5.6.5. They agreed they may also need to better define “incompatible uses or structures” in that section. The Board discussed the trigger in Clause #3F; the footprint of the solar array which does not include access roads, etc. Chuck R. suggested the Board add language from #3F to Section 5.6.5. Dennis P. reiterated that he feels the two items (Renewable Energy Projects & Commercial Development Projects) are simply too different to consider together.

The Board discussed their short timeline, agreeing that they would like to get this drafted for a Spring public hearing. They agreed to import Clause #3 a, b, d, f to Section 5.6.5, address a size threshold, which they considered revising to .25A within the VGA & .50A outside the VGA, and to apply the standard town-wide.

The Board considered setback from roads and the use of conifers vs. deciduous trees for year-round screening. James D. said the Board should also consider the density of the arrays in a given project as this changes impacts. The Board discussed again the idea of projects in the viewshed, and agreed that

developers should be required to provide adequate screening unless they can demonstrate that an installation is absorbed by its existing surroundings. Alex W. said Design Standards for rural areas (Section 6.12.4) do mention projects being absorbed by the landscape.

Minutes from 11/25: Aaron K. **made a motion to approve** the minutes of 11/25. Dennis P. **seconded the motion.** The board **voted 7-0.**

Other Business:

The Board acknowledged written correspondence from the ANR regarding an amendment to wetland permits for the VT Gas pipeline project.

The Board discussed their upcoming meeting dates and agreed to meet on 12/16 in lieu of the meeting on 12/23.

Alex W. said the Select Board will be hearing the Planning & Zoning Budget presentation on 1/4/16.

Alex W. noted that Kyle B.'s term ends in January and he will be stepping down at that time, so there will be an opening on the Planning Commission soon.

Maggie G. made a **motion to adjourn.** James D. **seconded** the motion. The meeting adjourned at 9:10pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Freeda Powers, Recording Secretary