

Norwich PC Solar Siting Subcommittee

September 19, 2023 Minutes

DRAFT

Members present: Clement, Laaspere

Members absent: Ciccotelli

Public participating: Linda Gray, Rob Gere, Kathleen Shepherd

Meeting started at 6:35

1. Approved Agenda
2. Public comment - none
3. Correspondence - none
- 4. Write a charge for the Solar Siting Subcommittee**

We reviewed and discussed the draft document in the packet - Charter and activity ideas. The feedback on the draft was positive with comments emphasizing the importance of creating clear and defined siting criteria. We agreed the document contained a full list of possible activities, and that to be successful, we would need to prioritize and select a few from the list to work on first. This idea guided the discussion described below.

This document will be submitted to the Planning Commission for discussion in the next meeting.

5. Review Energy Chapter of Town plan as it relates to solar siting/preferred site status

We had a fruitful discussion about how to create defined and specific siting criteria. It is clear from comments in other PUC cases and proposed changes to state regulation 5.100 that the state is encouraging towns to explore new methods for siting energy projects. For example, to be more specific about preferred sites within a town rather than simply making ambiguous statements such as “development is discouraged on ridgelines or in scenic areas.”

We talked about how to add this definition in Norwich, the current state of our plan and regulations, and where to focus first. We decided to start with the mapping and regulations for the ridgeline and scenic sections of the plan and zoning bylaws. These areas are clearly important to solar siting and were demonstrated to be ambiguous and undefined in recent PV siting projects.

The group felt an important first step would be to reach out to interested town groups, such as the HPC, Conservation commission, DRB, and the Selectboard, for inputs and priorities on the topic of ridgeline and scenic definition and protection. On the topic of scenic resources, we proposed an update of the scenic resource inventory, soliciting resident participation to answer the question: “what are the most important scenic resources within Norwich?”

We agreed to contact specific individuals & groups:

Clement: NCC – Craig Layne
Sara Reeves (scenic resource inventory)

Laaspere: DRB – Patrick Bradley
TRORC – Peter Gregory
Selectboard – Marcia Calloway

We discussed the need to answer many questions that will come up as we explore this complex topic and to maintain a list of questions and answers. These questions will be called out in the minutes for now and then perhaps consolidated in a location on the website.

- What exactly is an enhanced energy plan and do many of our neighboring towns already meet this threshold?
- What are the 2050 renewable generation targets apportioned to Norwich and what is our current installed capacity?

Rob Gere brought up an important question about potential economic impact of new regulations, particularly those which are very specific. If a land-use is either encouraged or excluded from a particular location, then land values will be impacted. How exactly should this issue be understood as we move towards greater specificity in our regulations?

6. Review State Regulations as they relate to solar siting/preferred site status

We discussed how state energy policies and goals create a context for our town work. Linda Gray pointed out that the state energy goal of 90% renewable generation by 2050 had been apportioned to the towns to give targets. For Norwich (calculated by TRORC) this amounts to approximately 16 MW of generating capacity within the town. Norwich currently has about 3 MW of installed capacity, or roughly 20% of the 2050 target. [Note – we need to confirm these numbers]

Part of a practically useful solar siting process would be a mapping exercise that creates overlays for important categories relating to solar projects, such as forest resources, slopes, electrical infrastructure, ridgelines, and scenic resources. If

done properly, and in keeping with the state's desire for specificity, these maps would guide development towards specific areas of preferred siting and show clear exclusion zones where such projects are strongly discouraged.

7. **Public comment** – Included in previous discussion

Next meeting will be October 17 at 6:30 on Zoom and will focus on discussion and public participation on the topic of ridgeline and scenic topics.

8. Adjourned at 8:35