

## **Norwich PC Solar Siting Subcommittee November 14, 2023 Minutes**

Members present: Ciccotelli, Clement, Laaspere

Public participating: Linda Gray, Steve Gorman, Dan & Jenn Goulet, Rob Gere

Meeting started at 6:35

1. Approved Agenda
2. Public comment for items not on the agenda - none
3. Correspondence – packet materials related to the agenda item on ridgeline and scenic inventory. No other correspondence was received.

### **4. Scenic Resources and Ridgeline Protection**

We had a productive conversation on three topics: scenic resource inventory, ridgeline protection overlays, and the creation of an enhanced energy plan. We discussed possible upcoming work relating to these topics and what tools & resources would be needed.

#### Scenic resource inventory

We reviewed the existing scenic resource inventory, dated 2000. This document has official importance since it is referred to in the active zoning bylaws. The group discussed how this resource needs an update and how we might go about doing this.

There are many questions to consider. For example, what is the appropriate audience for a scenic inventory? Are the drivers on I-91 given the same weight as town residents on a local road? Is the value of a scenic resource weighted proportionally by the number of people who see it? Would we include only resources which are visible from public places? Should it include views which can be seen from all classes of roads and trails, again weighted by usage or # of people per week that see it?

Perhaps trickiest of all – how do we define scenic? The 2000 inventory uses criteria like harmony, visual contrast, focal point, etc. i.e. aesthetics, along with uniqueness and sensitivity to development. How might we adjust these when we update the inventory?

We wondered whether there are specific tools relating to state highways, such as Rt. 5 and 132? Clement reported VT Rt. 100 had been designated a scenic by-way and that this afforded some level of protection.

Vermont State regulations seem to be pushing municipalities towards clearer community standards. We talked about how this pushed us to “sharpen our planning

tools” so we would be most effective implementing the resident’s wishes in our planning work. One thing we learned from the Upper Loveland solar debate – our scenic inventory was not specific enough. Also, our bylaws need improved definitions on terms such as development, structure, and steep slopes.

#### Use of website as reference tool

As we discussed these topics people shared many good ideas of available resources (people, maps, example plans and regulations, etc.) to help us in this work. A partial list is captured below.

- VNRC planning toolbox [in packet]
- Champlain Valley greenbelt alliance
- Charlotte town scenic inventory
- Vermont state statutes and regulations [5.100 solar regs, EEP guides]
- East Montpelier town plan
- Windham county regional energy planning

We discussed methods to collect these useful resources and make them accessible to everyone. Laaspere reported on the plan to use the Planning Commission section of the town web site as a shared repository. Each subcommittee has its own page and we can upload documents directly along with links to web resources. As we develop this tool, we will keep the logistics simple. Laaspere will be the point of contact for submissions, working with Pam to post references on the web site in a logical structure.

#### Mapping overlays

Many of our zoning results are captured using the tool of overlays. These are map layers which show how certain types of development are constrained in certain places. For example, preferred sites for solar projects are presented as a map overlay and the same tool is used for scenic resources, ridgelines, resource protection, wetlands, zoning districts, etc. Combining these layers provides the zoning and planning guidance for any place in town.

Given the importance of these overlays, we need better mapping tools which are compatible with state and regional base maps, show parcel boundaries and officially describe our zoning features like the ridgeline protection district.

#### Enhanced energy plan

As mentioned in a previous meeting, Peter Gregory at TRORC reported that several neighboring towns, including Thetford and Strafford, already have EEPs. It allows a town more influence over solar siting, but in turn we must identify suitable land sufficient to meet our goals under the state’s renewable energy plan. There are many resources to assist municipalities in creating these energy plans and we will assemble these tools on the web site.

On the topics of the scenic inventory and enhanced energy plan, we did not feel ready to report back to the Planning Commission. We decided to meet in December

to pull together resources and discuss when we will have something concrete to present to the full PC.

Committee members volunteered for various tasks:

Kris – Research Greenbelt Alliance and Charlotte examples, possibly find resource to help with scenic inventory

Ernie – Review East Montpelier plan, summarize highlights

Jaan – contact TRORC about enhanced plan, organize web site resources and work on possible mapping improvements.

All – review various resources as they are added to the web site

## **5. Approved minutes of October 17, 2023 - Unanimous**

Next meeting will be December 5, 2023, at 6:30 on Zoom. We will continue discussion on the topic of ridgeline and scenic resources as related to solar siting, pulling together collected resources mentioned above and possibly having a guest speaker. The goal is to present specific plans and ideas to the Planning Commission in January.

6. Adjourned at 8:40

Minutes submitted by Jaan Laaspere

APPROVED 12-05-2023