

Norwich PC Solar Siting Subcommittee

February 26, 2024 Minutes

DRAFT

Members present: Ciccotelli, Clement, Laaspere

Public participating: Linda Gray, Rob Gere, Zara Reeves, Susan Barrett, Amy Stringer

Meeting started at 6:35

1. Approved Agenda

2. Public comment for items not on the agenda - none

3. Correspondence

Letters: Shepherd, Andrews, Manganiello
New IREC introduction

4. Enhanced Energy Plan: Preferred Site Status/Criteria

Related packet material
2017 Norwich Energy data
2023 Sharon Town Plan

The subcommittee has decided to focus our work on updating our town energy plan to qualify as an enhanced energy plan (EEP). In our previous meeting (1.16.24) we had thought that a well-publicized public meeting would be an appropriate kick off for the significant project of creating an enhanced energy plan and we planned this event for our February meeting. However, we adjusted this plan based on new information.

Laaspere talked with TRORC to find a resource to assist with the project and with any public questions. After discussion with Peter Gregory at TRORC, Kyle Katz was identified as our resource. Kyle had already worked with TRORC staff to create a memo outlining specific changes needed in our plan to be considered an EEP. These language changes were relatively minor, except for one which will be discussed below.

We also learned that energy usage data for each municipality was being updated, with the new version available in a few months. This new data will be incorporated into our updated energy plan.

This information clarified the task of creating an enhanced energy plan and focused the effort onto the topic of preferred siting designation. Specifically, whether to remove the default preferred siting designation for certain types of net metering projects which currently exists in our energy plan [Policy 3-2.h p.22 and p.28].

The subcommittee expressed unanimous support for removing this default designation and replacing it with more detailed guidance. Members agreed that we

want to create an enhanced energy plan to give the town more influence into the siting of net metered solar projects. The default preferred siting language does the opposite, giving the town less influence on such projects. We will bring our proposal to eliminate this language to the full PC at their next meeting.

Removing the default preferred siting clause means we must create more detailed solar siting criteria. To qualify as an EEP, the siting guidelines must provide a credible path to achieving Norwich's energy goals, including siting sufficient renewable energy generation.

We discussed town goals for renewable energy generation which are given as a fraction of overall regional and state goals. A distinction was made between location of generation capacity and the use of the actual electricity or associated renewable credits. It is our understanding that the goals in the town plan refer to renewable generation capacity within the town. This means our stated goal of 16 MW requires that much capacity to be located within Norwich. Our energy plan must provide a credible means of achieving these goals to be approved.

One method for creating siting guidelines, which is used by several neighboring towns including Sharon, is to delineate a three-tiered siting criteria outline (see p.22 of Sharon's plan in packet). Land in town is designated either Preferred, Constrained or Excluded for net metering projects of 500kW or smaller. Adding the category of "constrained" or "allowed with mitigation", gives more flexibility and is more appropriate to the task.

Laaspere will compile a [very rough] draft of a three-tiered siting criteria framework, using our neighboring town plans as templates. The target is to have the first draft in the packet for the March 12th Planning Commission meeting. This will make the draft visible to the public and allow us to start conversations with interested groups, such as the Energy Committee, HPC, Selectboard and Conservation Commission. Clement will make initial contact with these groups to let them know this activity has begun and encourage them to participate when a draft becomes available. We will begin a detailed review of this draft at our next subcommittee meeting.

5. Approved minutes of January 16, 2023 - Unanimous

6. Adjourned at 8:20

Our next meeting will be March 26, 2024, and we will review of the rough draft of solar siting criteria compiled from neighboring town examples and discuss how to collect input from town groups and residents.

Minutes submitted by Jaan Laaspere