

Norwich PC Solar Siting Subcommittee

May 28, 2024 Minutes

DRAFT

Subcommittee members present: Mary Gorman, Jaan Laaspere

Public attending: Mary Albert, Rob Gere, Amy Stringer, Stephen Gorman, Annette Smith, Frances Mize (Valley News)

Meeting started at 6:35

1. **Approved Agenda** with adjustment to move organizational item earlier
2. **Public comment** for items not on the agenda - none

3. **Correspondence**

Solar siting comments from Katucki were discussed. Laaspere reported that a detailed follow-up to this comment was received on 5/28/24. A summary sentence from this new comment was read aloud since it was pertinent to the conversation on the impact of new 5.100 regs on preferred siting processes:

“To sum up, the conclusive presumption [Norwich’s default preferred solar] is not valid because: a) advanced designation of sites in municipal plans is no longer authorized, b) the presumption renders meaningless the required evaluation of the 45-day notice, and c) the blanket grant of preferred site status is contrary to PUC policy.”

The complete document will be in next meeting’s packet.

4. **Organizational meeting**

Moved and agreed unanimously – Gorman as subcommittee lead, Laaspere as clerk

5. **Town plan amendment discussion**

Annette Smith, Executive Director for Vermonters for a Clean Environment, again participated in the meeting. Her time is appreciated.

The group reviewed comments submitted by Mary Albert. In at least one case, these proposals were different from other proposed edits to the same passages. We agreed to submit all proposed changes to the full Planning Commission, compiled by the relevant section, so that decisions on final wording can be made by the PC.

We discussed the potential benefits of a balanced approach to solar siting in the Norwich town plan which would include both constraints on locations where PV would be inappropriate and identification of specific preferred areas. This push/pull approach could be more effective in both promoting and guiding renewable energy projects in town. It was noted that the fuzzy lack of guidance or constraint in the current default preferred site language has not resulted in completed PV projects.

An important open question is a town's ability to identify specific preferred sites within the new state 5.100 regulations, which stipulate that a site cannot be approved as preferred by the PC and SB until they have reviewed the 45-day notice application. Even though exact locations cannot be identified as preferred as a default, we believe this does not preclude the clear articulation of preferred and constraining criteria, up to and including specific mapped areas. More guidance is needed on this topic.

We hope to complete initial edits with one more meeting and then submit to the PC for discussion. The suggestion was made to invite interested town groups such as the Conservation Commission and Energy Committee for their input and give time for response. We agreed to post an initial packet for the next meeting early to give time for comments to be included in the final meeting packet.

In reviewing edits after the meeting, it was discovered that the working document being edited was an earlier draft version of the plan. We will update our starting point to the adopted plan and make sure all proposed edits are still applicable.

6. Approved minutes of April 30, 2024 - Unanimous

7. Adjourned at 7:40

Our next meeting will be June 18, 2024. As mentioned above, we will publish an initial packet containing the draft town plan edits on June 6 to give time for public input to be included in the next meeting packet, which has a submittal deadline of June 12.

Minutes submitted by Jaan Laaspere.