

## OVERVIEW

This committee will work to:

- Guide and encourage solar project siting in Norwich in locations which are appropriate to Norwich with its unique character, topography, and the desires of its residents.
- Create a collaborative process, using clear and defined siting criteria, resident input, and full participation in the PUC process.
- Use the planning tools available, including revisions to the town plan, zoning by-laws, and subdivision regulations.

## WORKING ASSUMPTIONS & GIVENS

State laws and regulations play a dominant role in the siting of medium and large solar projects. The town must understand how its inputs fit into this larger context to maximize our influence. These regulations have changed since the last revision of our town planning documents.

There exists strong societal pressure for renewable energy. This creates a development pressure to build PV projects in Norwich.

PV projects done appropriately and sensitively are desirable, within guidelines set up by the residents of Norwich.

There are technical considerations associated with these projects, such as economies of scale and design drivers relating to steep slopes, shading, infrastructure, etc.

## BACKGROUND

We will need to collect a great deal of background reference material, which can be used by both this committee and the wider Norwich community to help understand all elements of the solar siting process.

This information will include:

Details of state statutes & PUC process

Regional energy plan

Norwich specific conditions:

- Topography, slopes, forest blocks
- Agricultural soils and activities
- Rooftop solar opportunities
- State recognized preferred sites, e.g. gravel pits
- Utility infrastructure – 3 phase power
- Current town plan, zoning by-laws and subdivision regs

- Recent project experience

#### SUBCOMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

- Instigate and encourage town wide conversation on this important topic, including interested town groups and residents.
- Understand and create reference materials for state, federal and regional laws. Specifically, understand changes in state law that must be incorporated in our town plan and regs for Norwich's documents to be current.
- Review other towns experiences and best practices.
- Embed land use for solar projects into the bigger picture of land-use planning in Norwich.
- Discuss and clearly define criteria for solar project siting:
  - Slopes                      Ridgelines
  - Forest clearing          Scenic views – from where?
  - Farmland                  Wetlands
- Research and evaluate Norwich's methods for influence, using both incentives and limitations.
- Evaluate the possibility of creating an enhanced energy plan as a method to increase influence.
- Identify possible sites that are preferred. Within the context of state energy policy and statutes it is not a valid strategy to say no to all PV projects. Such a stance would reduce the town's influence on projects that are proposed.

#### SUBCOMMITTEE OUTPUT

1. Recommended changes to the town plan, zoning bylaws and subdivision regulations. These should include specific guidance on preferred siting. These would be included in the overall effort of the Planning Commission to amend these documents. Any changes would first be approved by the PC, then submitted to the Selectboard for approval.
2. A defined process for solar project siting with a focus on the Planning Commission's role, including use of party status, encouraging public participation, providing resources, etc.