

Norwich PC Solar Siting Working Group December 17, 2024 Minutes

APPROVED
07-22-2025

Subcommittee members present: Mary Gorman, Ernie Ciccotelli, Jaan Laaspere
Steven True, Norwich PD/ZA

Public attending: Mary Albert, Paul Manganiello, Amy Stringer, Kathleen Shepherd, Stephen Gorman, Robert Gere

Meeting started at 6:32

- 1. Approved Agenda** - unanimous
- 2. Public comment** for items not on the agenda - none
- 3. Correspondence**
Acknowledged receipt of correspondence in packet

4. Debrief of Planning Commission meeting

We discussed last week's PC meeting. It appeared more background communication from the working group was needed to create common understanding of the topic, including specifically what needed to change and how the town plan fit into other influences on solar siting.

Gorman shared slides [see Appendix] attempting to capture the "givens".

Laaspere outlined background information that would help clarify which variables were within the town's sphere of influence and what will be determined by other parties. Having summaries of these would be useful. These include state regulations (which will take precedence), regional commission policies, and commercial realities for solar developers. State regulations dictate many siting criteria including permissible forest cutting and wetlands disturbance. Commercial realities include the need for 3-phase power within a certain distance (~ 1/2 mile) of a prospective site.

The group discussed whether the relatively minor changes to the plan that have been proposed were sufficient or whether a more significant overhaul was needed. Often multiple topics have overlapping influence, such as different types of development balanced with habitat and scenic preservation or the energy impact of transportation. How can we best reflect the desires of Norwich residents while quickly giving the town a more useful plan for solar siting?

The solar siting topic comes down to the need for clear delineation of different areas of Norwich relative to potential for large ground-mount PV systems: Prime, Possible with mitigation and Prohibited, along with a clear and consistent process for evaluating specific projects.

This effort will use our scenic inventory, with this resource updated and maintained by the Planning Commission.

5. Next steps

Incorporate comments into a comprehensive background presentation.

Draft clear statements of justification and information needed for specifics such as solar project impact, prohibited / limiting criteria including slopes, scenic, ridgelines and riparian.

Talk with TRORC to clarify their positions and justifications.

Continue work to locate Prime areas for solar. Laaspere will contact the Energy Committee Chair about possible landowner and business contacts.

Review 3-phase power map with the assumption that extending more than 1/2 mile reduces a project's viability – see appendix for map

6. Approved minutes of November 19 and July 16, 2024 - Unanimous

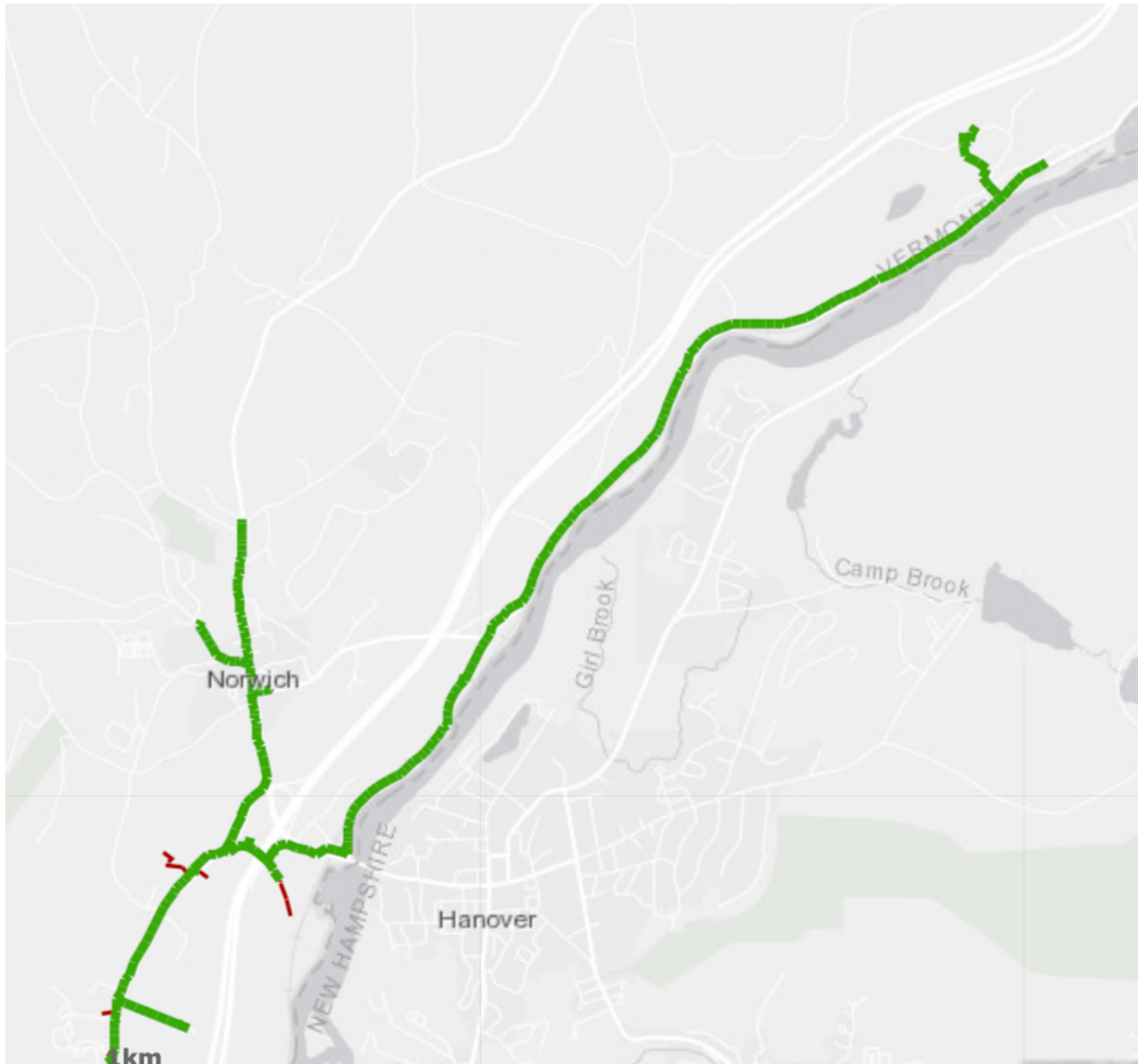
Meeting adjourned at 7:34

Minutes submitted by Jaan Laaspere

Appendix:

3-phase power map of Norwich
Gorman presentation discussed in meeting

3-Phase power lines in Norwich



Solar Siting Subcommittee

December 2024

Agenda

- Base case – Setting the ground rules
 - Town Plan's role in solar siting
 - Look at the Town Plan 2020
 - 5100 Rule and New Guidelines
- Goals of the Solar Siting Subcommittee
 - Ensure that the Norwich Town Plan is effective as a regulatory document
 - Strive to meet a range of objectives in the town
- Options to explore
 - Surgical edits
 - Identifying specific sites as Preferred, Potential, and No Go

Setting the Ground Rules

- Solar Siting Reviews for CPG projects are based **d** ONLY on Town Plans, not on Zoning Ordinances.
- Clear, regulatory language to review proposals is essential in order to ensure clarity for citizens, developers, Planning Commission (PC), Selectboard, and the state PUC.
- Per the state, solar generation facilities must be treated similar to other types and scales of development, in terms of allowable land uses in particular areas.
- While there are “quotas” or targets for energy for every town, the state now recognizes that towns have inherent limitations.

Norwich 2020 Town Plan MUST be changed

- Current Town Plan “automatically” or by “default” bestows preferred site status on nearly all of Norwich. Such provisions **are no longer valid** under the New Net-Metering Rule.
- The Norwich 2020 Town Plan essentially gave a “**blank check**” to solar development in nearly all of Norwich and yet VERY LITTLE development occurred.
- **WHY was there little development (outside of residential development)?**
 - Topography of the town
 - Limited access to three-phase solar

What are the short-term options for change for the Town Plan?

- OPTION ONE: Clarify with regulatory language – Focus of the Solar Siting
 - Specify the conditions and characteristics.
 - Use clear language (e.g. “must” and “shall”)
 - Given the lack of restriction in the current Town Plan, this will feel “more restrictive”
- OPTION TWO: Identify “preferred”, “potential” and “unsuitable” sites
 - Clearly identify in the plan specific areas
 - Requires mapping exercise
 - Consultation with landowners is beneficial

Option One: Solar Siting Effort thus far

Surgical edits to clarify intent

- Removal of default preferred solar siting for most of town area per 5100 Rule.
- The projects may not be located on land that have any of the following characteristics:
 - Slopes greater than 15% (to be discussed)
 - In the Historic Village District; Ridgeline Protection Overlay Area ; Shoreline Protection Area; High Priority Forest Blocks (See map in Town Plan); Riparian areas
 - For discussion: in Scenic areas
- Review of potential glare from solar projects
- For larger solar projects (>500kW) the proposed edits say these larger projects are prohibited OR perhaps permitted in specific identified sites.
- Consider creating a Solar Energy district for preferred site areas.

Option Two: Identify Preferred, Potential and No Go areas

Preferred:

Gravel pits; Brownfield sites; Parking lots; Commercial and Residential Roofs.

From the State Document – other options:

Promote installation of solar projects

- where there is electric demand
- on locations where the land has already been impacted (e.g. roofs, parking lots, landfills).

Support updates to municipal building standards and energy codes that promote incorporation of solar photovoltaics for new construction and major renovations (including rooftops).

Promote or adopt building code requirements that require passive solar design and siting principles to be incorporated into new buildings that have a large hot water load (i.e. laundromats, hotels).

Develop guidelines for developers seeking preferred siting letters for net-metering projects

Prohibited – No Go - Areas

Need clarity of regulatory language and must be aligned with regulatory language of other development and must be specific regarding location by naming roads, ridgelines, districts.

- Riparian
- Shoreline
- Ridgeline
- Visible by “scenic” roads
- Vernal pools
- Steep slopes, e.g. greater than XX degrees