

Readfield Planning Board

Meeting Minutes of August 22, 2023 - Approved

Planning Board Members Present: Paula Clark (Chair), Jack Comart, Don Witherill, George O'Connor, Brandon Fike, John Mitchell, Henry Clauson, Peter Bickerman,

Excused: Bill Buck

Others Attending: Chip Stephens (CEO), Anjelica Pittman (Board Secretary), Josh Neretin (Syncarpha), Jarron Shaw, Melissa Fan, Michael Atkinson (Syncarpha), Bruce Hunter, Jerry Bley, Linnea Koons

Meeting called to order by Paula at 6:33 PM

Syncarpha:

The board met with representatives of Syncarpha Solar to discuss compliance issues with the project site located at 368 Main Street, map 136, lot 019. After a site visit by Chip and Henry, both on-site and administrative compliance issues were identified.

The first issue addressed was the inability of Readfield residents to sign up for solar credits via the Syncarpha website that indicated no further availability for this location. Michael stated that a mailer had been sent out for advertisement already; however they would be willing to produce and send out a second mailing with more specific details to give Readfield residents the opportunity to sign up. Several Planning Board members indicated they had never received or seen a mailer. Michael also stated residents can call or email him at any time to sign up since he was uncertain whether the website information could be revised.

There was discussion concerning compliance with the condition of approval requiring conveyance of agricultural conservation easements on the 20 acres developed for the solar project when that site is no longer used for solar energy production, and on the remaining approximately 70 acres of the parcel prior to the issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy or Use by the Town. Syncarpha proposed that the 20-acre site be protected from future development through the placement of a deed restriction allowing only for solar energy production or agriculture (which could include hay rides, pumpkin picking, etc.). Maine Farmland Trust has purchased an Agricultural Conservation Easement over the undeveloped 70 acres. The board advised that Syncarpha's real estate attorney speak with the Town attorney. The Board agreed that the Town attorney should also review the documents relating to the easement and the deed restriction proposal submitted by Syncarpha.

A new state law requires state review and approval of certain solar project decommissioning plans. Michael stated they have already obtained DEP approval for the Readfield project and for several others. He believes the DEP permit was already sent to the town, but he will get the documents to Chip to follow up.

Erosion and sedimentation control on the project site is not currently sufficient. There were berms installed at one point but several have since been damaged or blown out. No silt fences were installed (however, it was agreed that placement of erosion control mix is more effective), and erosion and oil staining were observed in construction alleys. Josh Neretin responded that the berms will be rebuilt when an access road is built. He also stated that construction traffic tore up the property and is being remedied now. Placement of ground cover and hay and grading will be done to help the land recover. The board requested a remedial erosion and sedimentation plan be submitted to the Town. Henry requested that the berm at the bottom of the property be remedied first and foremost as the flowing water runoff is going into the wetlands at the bottom of the property.

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A considerable amount of waste, including trash and concrete, was still left on site following the Town's request for cleanup. Josh responded that they have been cleaning it up incrementally, two dumpsters are currently on-site for collection, and cleanup will be completed in the next few weeks.

Concern about the panel height was raised since the application indicated that panels would be no higher than 10 feet, and in many areas it was found that panel height varies, up to 14 feet. Josh responded that that is typical with solar projects and that not a lot can be done now to correct the situation without greatly affecting installation. Michael added that the height of the panels was the result of poor communication on Syncarpha's part. Josh will do some measurements and see what percent of the project is above the height restriction. Chip added that the 10-foot height restriction is to help minimize view of the panels from residences and roadways; planting taller trees may provide better screening of panels over 10 feet tall. Josh said some plantings are already being done, so the board requested that the measurements be done next week in order to get taller trees in where they need to be.

Erosion on the site has exposed fence posts and concrete in some areas. There are also locations along the fencing that is filled in at the bottom, not allowing for small animal passage as required by the permit. The fencing, as well as the tree plantings previously mentioned, would both require continual maintenance. The Board asked Josh if he had considered adding an access gate at the back of the property in case of fire so the Fire Department could use water from the pond. Josh stated that they prefer not to do too many access gates to eliminate injuries and break-ins, but that there will be cameras videoing intermittently. Josh also said that he has never seen a fire at a solar site, however he has seen malfunctioning equipment melt, but there are protective measures in place to stop a short in one piece from moving on to another.

The final issue discussed was that CMP power poles were not located where the application indicated it would be. Josh said he will check his emails but he believes he spoke with Chip about it. The landowners were adamant about the placement and Syncarpha tried to accommodate them. Chip believes he shared the emails but will double check. The permit will need to be updated to reflect that placement change.

Consider approval of minutes from July 11, 2023 & July 25, 2023:

Motion to approve both sets of minutes as amended made by Jack, **seconded** by George, **vote 5-0** in favor.

Other Business:

The board discussed another new solar application coming in; most of the application binders were already picked up, reminder to board members to pick theirs up if they have not already done so. A meeting date has not been set but will likely occur September 12, 2023.

Paula reminded everyone to please let her or Chip know in advance if they will not make a meeting.

MMA training for the new Planning Board members needs to be accomplished and forwarded to Kristin Parks to be recorded. Training sessions are coming up in October and December; it is also a great refresher for members who have been on the board for a while. Sign up for training with Teresa Shaw at the Town Office.

The Roy variance application was reviewed by the Board of Appeals and denied. Paula sent an email to the Roys regarding their pending application before the Planning Board for a shed, and how to move forward, by either lowering the height of the shed or moving it to another location.

Future Meeting: The next Planning Board meeting is currently scheduled for September 12, 2023.

Meeting adjourned by Paula at 8:30 PM

Prepared by Anjelica Pittman, Board Secretary (approved 09/12/2023)