

Readfield Planning Board

Meeting Minutes of September 26, 2023 - Approved

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

Excused: Peter Bickerman

Others Attending: Chip Stephens (CEO), Anjelica Pittman (Board Secretary), Martha Staskus (Norwich), Geoff Martin (Norwich), Kara Moody (Stantec)

Meeting called to order by Paula at 6:30 PM

Public Meeting:

Readfield Main Street Solar LLC: Proposal to construct The Main Street Solar Project, a distributed generation large scale solar energy system on the south side of Main Street (route 17). Norwich Technologies manages the Applicant. The proposed project is a ground-mounted solar facility comprised of solar panels mounted 3 feet above grade and 10 feet to the top of panels above grade. The array will be arranged in multiple rows running East-West. The installed capacity will be up to 975 kilowatts AC (kWac). The proposed project includes other pads, connections, fences and related components. The project parcel is 71.93 acres and the site will be on an open field portion of the parcel. The total fenced area will be 9.59 acres, the total project limits will be 17.51 acres and total impervious area of the project will be .25 acres. The address is on Main Street at Map 143 Lot 014 in the Rural District.

Kara Moody (of Stantec) and Martha Staskus (of Norwich) summarized their initial plans and goals with this project, and reviewed the application and drawings. The board asked if they were familiar with the new state law regarding decommissioning of solar sites, and they were. The board also asked about the height of the panels and if they will be 10' (as required by town ordinance) or 12' as proposed in the application, Kara explained that was an error, the panels will be 10' and that will be corrected on the application.

The board requested some measurements be added to their drawings for specificity; Kara and Martha agreed to do so. IF&W already completed its review of rare or endangered animals potentially in the area of the site.

The applicants were asked about the request for a background noise measurement waiver, Kara and Martha responded that they had discussed the waiver with Chip. A standard assessment determined the noise level to be 32 dBA at the property line. Inverters and transformers will be located 1000' off the road with the nearest residence 150' away.

The size of the project was discussed, Readfield ordinance allows 20% of the lot to be used for solar, the applicants explained the footprint within the fenced area is about 10 acres of the almost 72 acres. There will be a staging area during construction. They offered to do an itemized list to make this clearer.

Much of the parcel has an existing vegetative buffer to keep the view screened; the existing farm road will continue to be the access road, vegetation will be cut back on the west side of the parcel to open the field but a 50' buffer of vegetation will be left; the east side of the lot will not need any cutting. Wood from cut vegetation will be ground and used for storm water infrastructure.

The board and the applicants discussed conservation efforts and uses for this project parcel, as well as the possible need for soil testing since this lot was previously used as a septage disposal site.

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A bigger concern for the board on this project is the possible requirement for rezoning (currently floating district) as a commercial industrial district due to the size of the infrastructure. The solar panels would measure larger than 5000 square feet, requiring that rezoning. Rezoning requires a Town Meeting vote, the next regularly scheduled to occur in June 2024. Paula will contact the town attorney and the Town Manager regarding this issue.

Until the rezoning issue can be further researched and addressed, the board agreed to hold off on a completeness determination. If rezoning is not required, the applicants propose a timeline of site preparation in November 2023; cutting would be completed in the winter, underground work completed in the spring with completed installation and CMP kickoff the first quarter of 2024.

Minutes of September 12, 2023:

Minutes tabled until next meeting

Other Business:

Chip raised concern about incorporating certain new statutory provisions into the ordinance. The Board suggested he prepare an initial draft of revisions for the Board's consideration and add them to the queue for the next LUO revision package. A grant supporting municipal efforts to incorporate the provisions of LD 2003 has already been applied for and received by the Town Manager.

Meeting adjourned by Paula at 8:00 PM