

Shaftsbury Planning Commission

May 10, 2023

In person at Cole Hall and remotely via Zoom

1. Call to order

The meeting came to order at 6 p.m. Present were commissioners Naomi Miller (chair), Nancy Burns, Chris Williams, Mike Foley, and Martha Cornwell. Also present was zoning administrator Shelly Stiles.

2. Approval of minutes.

Ms. Cornwell moved to approve the April 26, 2023 minutes. Mr. Williams seconded the motion, which passed 4-0-1, with Mr. Foley abstaining.

3. Public comments

There were none.

4. Discussion of ongoing items

Commissioners shared their thoughts regarding the solar project petition, project # 23-1447 PET filed earlier in the month with the Vermont Public Utility Commission. (Some or all of the thoughts could be shared in the Commission's testimony before the PUC.)

Members of the group commented:

- It is important to note that the carbon released by the cutting of trees for the project would be recaptured within one year of operation of the facility.
- The table showing the breakdown of taxes, especially what is for the town and what for the school, is confusing.
- The final destination of the energy to be produced is unclear.
- What is to happen to the existing water line on the property? What will its decommissioning look like and what kind of pipe is it?
- Two rather small blocks of panels, in the northeast corner and in the north central portion of the proposed array, would be most visible for Holy Smoke landowners. Could they be moved elsewhere on site?
- We sympathize with citizen concern about the scale of the project.
- The connection to Route 7 is brilliant.
- Solar exposure on the site is excellent.
- No herbicide use should be allowed.
- The list of pollinator plants is short.
- How much energy does Shaftsbury use and how does the project's production compare to that number?
- Could residents be given a break on future electric bills, or receive rebates?
- Will the solar panels be recycled upon decommissioning? It is important that they not be landfilled.
- The impact on views from off site doesn't seem significant. The project is well buffered.
- Is the value of the proposed increase in the grand list equal or greater to the likely negative impact of the project?
- Are there reasons to be concerned about the trustworthiness and expertise of the company? We need more information about who is going to execute the project and their credibility.

Ms. Cornwell said she thought the Select Board and the Planning Commission would be submitting comments jointly.

Mr. Foley will ask Town of Cocksackie officials about their experience with the solar company.

5. Other business

In other matters, it was noted that:

- The May 31 meeting will be devoted to discussing BCRC's energy analysis.
- The June 14 meeting will be a public meeting on the enhanced energy plan (at Cole Hall).
- At the June 28 meeting, the Commission will refine its comments for the PUC. Mr. Williams will draft a "sense of the commission" statement for review at that time.
- Mr. Foley and Mr. Williams may be able to present their recommendations on bylaw changes to promote affordable housing at the July 26 meeting.
- Ms. Miller will file the Notice of Intervention Form with the EPUC.

Ms. Cornwell moved to adjourn at 7:15 p.m. Mr. Foley seconded the motion, which passed 5-0-0.