

Plympton Planning Board - Minutes

September 3, 2019

2019 OCT 29 AM 10:49

Meeting opened at 6:50 p.m.

Planning Board members in attendance: Ms. Sobolewski; Mr. Schmid; Mr. D'Angelo; Ms. MacDonald

Public Hearing for Solar Project 0 Lake Street

Mr. Schmid recuses himself as he is an abutter to the project

Sarah Stearns, Beals & Thomas, engineer for the project makes a presentation on behalf of the property owner, Larry Harju, applicant is identified as Plympton Lake St. Solar, LLC

She states that the access for the property is from West Street in Kingston. There are 113 total acres. The project proposes two areas of ground mounted solar panels located in existing wooded uplands. The uplands will be clear cut in order to install the solar panels and additional trees will be cur around one of the solar panel locations to ensure that the panels are not shaded by vegetation.

A set of floating solar panels are also proposed. These panels would be located on the existing 23 acre reservoir and, in their current configuration, will occupy 9 acres of the reservoir. Ms. Stearns states that the project is undergoing MEPA and Conservation Commission review and it is anticipated that one of the floating panel sets will be removed from the project. The MEPA review includes consideration of the fact that the property is habitat for the eastern box turtle. She states that there are not anticipated to be changes to the ground mounted solar panels.

Ms. Stearns states that in connection with the project a conservation restriction will be imposed on 18 ½ acres of the property.

In addition to installing the solar arrays, the project includes the installation of an underground utility covenant running from the solar arrays out to lake Street. There will be 2 to 3 poles at lake Street as well as a cleared area for trucks to pull off Lake Street onto the property. Battery storage will be located between/among the rows of panels.

Mr. D'Angelo requests detailed information/specifications for the solar panels. He would like to understand the chemical composition of the panels and what environmental issues they would pose if they are damaged after installation and as they may deteriorate over time. He raises this as an issue with respect to trespassers and hunters potentially damaging the panels. Mr. D'Angelo reiterates that Plympton's residents are reliant on their own wells and the natural aquifer beneath the town. As such, he wants assurances that there will be no negative impacts to the groundwater water. Ms.Stearns indicates that such information can be provided.

~~Ms. MacDonald requests information about the impacts to the pond that are~~ anticipated to be caused by the installation of the floating panels. Ms.Stearns indicates that such information can be provided.

Ms. MacDonald asks whether a dual use would be possible (locating the panels on the bogs). Ms. Stearns indicates that dual use is “not a good fit” for the site because the method of cranberry production would have to change if the panels were located on the bogs and the property owner does not want to do that.

Ms. Sobolewski asks for the specific amount of deforestation associated with the project and is informed that there will be 12 acres deforested for the installation of the standard ground mounted solar. Ms. Sobolewski inquires as to the amount of disturbance that will occur for the installation of the conduit and the “pull in area” for vehicles off Lake Street. Ms. Stearns states that the pull in area is 18’ wide and 20’ long and 60’ deep with an estimated .4 of an acre disturbed in its construction. She states that the conduit need not have a great deal of excavation on either side in order for it to be installed.

Mr. d’Angelo asks Ms. Stearns to provide detailed information on the type of bond/surety that they propose for decommissioning. He notes that they need to provide an adequate surety, specifically, one that would last the life of the solar panels and be sufficient to cover decommissioning and any other issues that may arise in the decommissioning process which were caused by the existence and operation of the array.

Ms. MacDonald asks for the production estimate of the arrays and is informed by Ms. Stearns that there will be 3.5 megawatts generated by the pond panels and 3.5 megawatts generated by both of the ground mounted solar arrays, combined.

Ms. Stearns notes that Pat Jackson from Sun Raise can explain about the panels in greater detail.

She describes the proposed screening of the panels, stating that there is a proposed 100’ wooded buffer then shade management between the wood line and a fence which will be constructed around the ground mounted solar panels. No fence is proposed around the floating panels because the property owner wants to access the reservoir. The woods along the Kingston Town Line will be maintained. She describes the undergrowth in the forest, that will serve as a buffer, a sparse, consisting of a mix of pine and oak trees. Ms. Sobolewski and Mr. D’Angelo suggest that additional vegetation may be necessary to ensure that the arrays are fully screened from the abutting residential properties, as required by the bylaw.

The discussion was opened up to public commentary:

Mr. Schmid (as a member of the public and an abutter) inquired about the location where the 12 acres of trees were being removed and the cuts and fills that will be associated with the project. Ms. Stearns informs him that the area to the north is a very steep sandy slope and states that it will be graded to 15% but that the cuts and fills on site will be balanced.

Ms. Brandi O’Neil, an abutter to the project, requests additional planting to screen the arrays from view. It is noted that the wooded area that will be the 100 foot buffer does

not have a dense evergreen understory, rather, it has deciduous plants that will not screen the array during the months of the year when those plants are defoliated.

Mr. Steve Beckwith, an abutter to the project, notes that the hill overlooking the pond is visible from his yard in the winter because the undergrowth that is present in the summer dies down. Ms. JoAnn Beckwith affirms that the orange stakes and the test pit installed as part of this application are visible from her yard now, even though it is still summer and the vegetation has not yet died down.

Mr. Robert Sears, of the Silver lake Chapel, an abutter to the project, raises concerns about the effect of grading associated with the project and whether it will negatively affect the back corner of the Chapel's parking lot.

Mr. John Dorchester, an abutter to the project, discusses the location of the Chapel's parking lot with respect to the location of the proposed work.

The Board, the abutters and Ms. Stearns schedule a site visit for Saturday September 14, 2019 to afford everyone the opportunity to view the property from the abutters' land and discuss appropriate screening vegetation.

Public hearing continued to September 23, 2019 at 7:00 p.m.

8:30 Ms. Sobolewski moves for the Board to accept the project review proposals of John Chessia, P.E. to complete his review of the 0 Brook Street project and to review the 0 Lage Street project. Ms. MacDonald seconds. Unanimous vote in favor.

Ms. Sobolewski moves to adjourn, Mr. Schmid seconds, unanimous vote. Meeting adjourned at 8:40