

# Town of Princeton, MA Planning Board

## Public Hearing and Meeting Minutes October 6, 2021

### Town Hall Annex and GoToMeeting

*Committee Members Present in-person at Town Hall Annex:* John Mirick (JM), Ian Catlow (IC), Rud Mason (RM); Alternate Corey Burnham-Howard (CBH)

*Committee Members Present via remote:* Ann Neuburg (AN), Alternate Lisa Drexhage (LD)

*Committee Members Absent:* Tom Sullivan (TS)

*Public Attendees via remote:* Richard Rys (Princeton Board of Light Commissioners, Chair)

**Call to order:** 7:44pm

### Review and Approve Regular Meeting Minutes of September 15, 2021

- Members discussed minutes and CBH suggested minor correction.
  - o **MOTION** to approve minutes as corrected.  
Motion: CBH; 2d: AN; Vote: 3-0 (CBH voting as Alternate; abstaining- IC, RM)

### Consider Long-Range Planning Projects:

- **Senior Housing:**
  - o Members discussed Selectboard email seeking applicants for “Princeton Housing Production Planning Committee”.
    - **MOTION** to appoint AN as the Planning Board (PB) member on the Princeton Housing Production Planning Committee (PHPP)  
Motion: IC; 2d: RM. Vote: 4-0
  - o JM asked AN to work as a liaison between the PB and PHPP and to report back to the PB with relevant information. AN reported that thus far she has been educating herself but nothing otherwise to yet report.
    - **ACTION:** AN to reach out to Selectboard Member Matthew Moncreaff regarding PHPP and senior housing planning

- **Solar Generation:**

Members discussed long-term planning item of solar generation zoning regulation.

- o JM reported that he invited RR (as Chair of Board of Light Commissioners) to a PB meeting to discuss solar generation planning, particularly in light of new Massachusetts legislation (S.9) requiring 50% of Princeton Municipal Light Plant’s power purchase to come from “non-carbon emitting” sources by 2030.
- o RR reported on and discussed PMLD considerations with regard to current Nextera power purchase contract and future regulatory power purchase requirements. With regard to the possibility of solar generation, PMLD would be interested in a commercially-owned facility at the old town landfill site, as well as

to identify potential other solar sites in town. The town has reserved transmission capability for 1 Megawatt of power to the Westminster Substation, so a 1 Megawatt solar generation facility would be feasible with regard to transmission capabilities. Additionally, transmission line upgrades may be considered in the future.

- RR and IC discuss acreage needed to produce 1 Megawatt of electricity and determine approximately 3 to 10 acres would be needed.
- Princeton's old landfill site is approx. 8-9 acres with a right-of-way and surrounding DCR property. RM noted possible environmental considerations, and CBH noted Mike Howard performed a preliminary desktop review of environmental considerations for the site back in 2019 when looking at meeting Green Community designation criteria.
- CBH noted that on November 12, 2019, the Princeton Selectboard voted "all in favor to support leasing the property at the former landfill off of Hubbardston Road for use as a solar energy generation facility, if feasible."
- CBH advocated for a solar overlay zone so that the Planning Board could provide standards for things such as placement, design, construction, operation, monitoring, modification and removal of solar generation installations that address public safety, minimize impacts on scenic, natural and historic resources, and provide adequate financial assurance for the eventual decommissioning of such installations.
- JM asked the Board members if the Planning Board should explore a solar overlay zone and criteria to be considered. He suggested looking at the current bylaw to determine whether it inhibits the state's carbon-emission reduction goals or how it can be changed to encourage achievement of the goals.
  - RM suggested that the biggest impact to consider is viewshed
  - IC inquired if Planning Board should also consider issue of rooftop solar at residences such as relates to view from street
    - RR noted that next PMLD meeting will discuss PMLD's net-metering policy
    - JM noted that current zoning allows rooftop solar panels but free-standing solar panels must meet setback requirements. JM raised issue of regulation of group of residents combined solar systems perhaps based on size, but RR noted that PMLD connection policy may limit that option for residents since PMLD requires all customers' purchase of power be from PMLD
    - CBH noted that under Massachusetts regulations, zoning bylaws cannot prohibit solar installations
  - RM expressed concerns about effects of a solar zoning overlay on property owners. He also noted need for consideration of "competing interests" such as a rural preservation district and a solar overlay
  - IC inquired about the issue of spot zoning, and JM said that would not be an issue where solar facilities are already allowed in the Business/Industrial zones
  - LD suggested Planning Board keep aware of code changes that may be applicable such as the Stretch Code requirement that new roof installations have the ability to support solar installations. LD also asked

how solar zoning ties into the Master Plan, and JM noted that the planning process could impact future proposed zoning.

#### **- Noise Bylaw**

The Selectboard asked the Planning Board to consider a noise bylaw based in part on complaints received regarding motorcycles, chainsaws, saw mills, and earth sifting operations. Members discussed considerations of a noise bylaw.

- JM asked the Board members whether they thought Princeton should have a noise bylaw, noting that the zoning bylaws already refer to impacts to neighboring properties (such as is considered with site plan reviews) but also noting that noise regulation is not currently quantified. JM suggested bylaw considerations might include: How to quantify noise regulation: decibels, length of noise, time of day, and whether specific activities are regulated.
  - CBH suggested that how a noise bylaw would be enforced should be considered. She referenced Town of Ayer Noise Bylaw as an example for enforcement mechanisms.
  - CBH noted that Environmental Action Committee (EAC) included consideration of a noise bylaw as an action item in its Environmental Action Plan—to support the town’s rural character and human and environmental health and welfare. CBH noted that the EAC recently voted to offer support as needed to the Planning Board as it considers a noise bylaw.
    - RM suggested that part of the town’s “rural character” is the ability of residents to use equipment and recreate
  - RM would want any noise bylaw to remain simply worded, as consistent with the rest of the town’s zoning bylaws.
  - Members discussed a noise bylaw as a “guardrail” vs “detailed” regulation
- JM suggested Board members move forward on this issue by looking at examples of noise bylaws (compiled and shared by CBH) and highlighting wording/parts liked. Members agreed to move forward with this approach.

#### **- Encouraging Business**

Members considered the long-term planning goal of encouraging business in town.

- JM noted that there were not many areas in town that could be re-zoned as business. JM noted that changes would more likely be found in expanding or relaxing definitions of “home occupation”
  - RM suggested encouraging business not by more development but by encouraging more work-from-home opportunities, perhaps loosening some home occupation restrictions, while more tightly regulating traffic and other factors that could affect neighbors
    - Members generally voiced preference for exploration of such an approach.

**Next Agenda Items**

- Administrative Business
  - o Review and approve regular meeting minutes of October 6, 2021
  - o Review any mail
- Consider any ANR plans
- Consider Long-Term Planning Projects:
  - o Noise Bylaw – members share preferred language
  - o Encouraging Business

**Meeting adjourned** at 9:17p.m.

**MOTION** to adjourn.

- Motion: IC; 2d: RM; Vote: 4-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Corey Burnham-Howard