

Town of Princeton Solar Farm Committee (SFC)

Meeting Minutes

October 13, 2023

Meeting Called to Order at 11:07am

Attendance:

- Members present, virtually: Richard Chase (RC); John Mirick (JM); Bruce Dean (BD); Corey Burnham-Howard (CBH)
- Members absent: Helga Lyons (HL)
- Liaisons present, virtually: Gerald Pellegrini (GP) of EAC
- Liaisons absent: Lar Greene (LG) of Board of Health; Bob Cummings (BC) of Selectboard

Agenda:

- Members reviewed the agenda.

Meeting Minutes:

- RC brought up review of minutes from the Solar Farm Working Group August meeting. JM opined that since that group was no longer active, SFC need not review and approve those meeting minutes.

Administrative Items:

- Members discussed the organization of the new committee.
 - o JM nominated RC as Chair.
 - o CBH nominated JM as Vice Chair.
 - o CBH volunteered to be Secretary for 6 months, suggesting the role be rotated among members periodically.
- **VOTE:** Unanimous approval to fill SFC positions: Chair- RC; Vice Chair- JM; Secretary- CBH

OLD BUSINESS

Landfill Access Road Site Visit to Discuss Culvert Condition

- RC noted that on September 19, 2023, a meeting was held at the access road to the former town landfill, with attendance by DCR representatives, Highway Department representatives, Rick Rys, and Conservation Commission representatives (including GP).
- GP briefly summarized that meeting, noting that the culvert that runs under the access road (through which the East Branch of the Ware River flows) is in bad condition and may pose a hazard to Highway Department personnel as they traverse it to access the landfill for maintenance. RC noted his observations of rust and some caving in of the culvert, but that it seemed to do its job during the recent heavy rain events. RC noted that the Highway Department had placed a heavy metal plate across the access road so that they could get equipment across for maintenance of the landfill site. GP noted that DCR (who owns the access

road over which the Town has an access easement) offered a temporary option of a loan of a portable bridge.

- RC raised for discussion the options of permanent solutions for culvert repair. CBH inquired as to whether a replacement was necessary for landfill maintenance or only in the event of a solar development. CBH stated that if the latter, town residents had been previously assured that any costs related to the solar development would be borne by a solar developer. CBH opined that it was not for the SFC to determine options for potential culvert replacement but that any required culvert improvements would be subject to engineering reports and requirements of environmental regulatory agencies. JM noted that language in the RFP therefore may need to include the possible needed expense/repairs for culvert upgrades at the access road. RC suggested that it would be helpful if the SFC could get a rough estimate of the costs, timeframe, and environmental permits that might be needed for any culvert repairs necessary at the site.
- CBH noted that she also understood that at the meeting DCR has expressed that there would be a need for a utility easement over the access road and that they typically do not grant such easements. GP advised that had been discussed and agreed on the summary of DCR's position. CBH noted that it was her understanding that DCR does give utility easements regularly for utility projects and that the easement holder would be whomever would own the transmission lines on the access road—whether the solar developer or perhaps PMLD.

Sterling Interconnection

- RC updated members as to progress on a possible transmission interconnection to Sterling. He explained that available load capacity to the grid through the National Grid feed via Westminster is limited but may have available capacity for 1 MW. PMLD and SMLD have been discussing a possible interconnection which RC stated would allow for plenty of capacity for 1 MW or greater of electricity generation from a solar development on the landfill. RC informed members that Sterling was currently conducting a load and capacity study with relation to the possible interconnection project. RC had asked for but could not obtain a firm timeline on possible "stamp of approval" for an interconnection project. RC noted that an interconnection project would run down Leominster Rd from Sterling. He noted that PMLD would have to upgrade approx. ½ mile of line to 3-phase and that PMLD had already approved such work in relation to an interconnection. He also noted that Sterling would also have to upgrade approximately ½ mile of conductors on Justice Hill Rd.
- **ACTION:** RC to investigate the available capacity for 1 MW on the National Grid feed to Westminster.

Solar Site Expansion

- GP expressed interest in expanding the potential site area for solar development to include the sand pit adjacent to the former landfill. He noted that a potentially large size solar facility would attract greater interest for developers.
- RC explained that the Solar Farm Working Group had decided to take this project in two phases—with the first phase being lease of the town-owned landfill site for solar development; and a potential phase 2 of looking at expanding the site area for solar development.

- BD inquired as to how much additional MW capacity an expansion of a solar development onto the sand pit area would garner, and RC estimated it at 3-4 additional MW. RC noted that the transmission line capacity was 15MW with the windmills already contributing 3 MW, a PMLD battery project to contribute 2MW, and thus the availability for solar generated electricity.
- CBH noted that the adjacent sandpit land is owned by DCR and is property located in a Watershed Protection Act jurisdiction. CBH noted that any “land swap” to acquire that land from DCR would require a parcel of land of greater or equal resource value and an Article 97 legislature vote because of the change in use of public lands.

NEW BUSINESS

Action Items

- CBH suggested the SFC create an Action Item list/ table with timeframes and action item assignments so that the SFC could strategically and timely pursue steps to a potential solar farm development.
 - CBH suggested that all SFC members review the Massachusetts Guide to Developing Solar PVs at Massachusetts Landfills. She offered to share the link with members. She also suggested that it might be helpful for new members if she shared documents and resources related to the site and solar development. Members agreed.
 - **ACTION:** CBH to share links to resources and site-related documents with members as an FYI.
 - CBH noted as an example of action list items that there were some additional feasibility assessments that needed to be addressed prior to engaging in any RFP work. Specifically, she suggested: (1) SFC meet with MassDEP to discuss the plan to lease the former landfill to a solar developer so as to complete due diligence such as with regard to the technical capacity of the landfill, the cap load limit, etc., and to obtain advice as to best methods, construction considerations, RPF considerations, etc.; (2) SFC to meet with PMLD to obtain updates and information on an interconnection to Sterling (necessary for transmission load for any solar energy facility) and to discuss all interconnection issues such as voltage rating; ownership of transmission lines over the access road; process for seeking approval to connect PV to the grid; and any insurance mandate for MW scale size; (3) SFC to meet with the Board of Assessors to get their opinion of the best tax method for inclusion in RFP- tax (realty; person; or commercial) or PILOT agreement; (4) SFC to meet with DCR to discuss the process for obtaining a utility easement over the access road for transmission lines.
 - CBH suggested sharing the draft action list with members for review and revision at next meeting. JM suggested that CBH first collaborate and refine with RC before sharing with members.
 - **ACTION:** CBH to share draft action list with RC for his review, comment, edit.
- BD offered a possible presentation to the SFC by a member of the Energy Facilities Siting Board if that might be helpful. RC noted that the EFSB would only be involved for projects greater than 15 MW, but noted this possible resource was appreciated and might be useful in the future.

- BD inquired as to a summary of the remaining “hurdles” to a solar project at the landfill site, and the members summarized them as: interconnection to Sterling; utility easement from DCR; and possibly access road culvert repair.
- BD asked whether any neighboring communities had similarly leased former landfills for solar development. RC answered that hundreds have, and a few examples of neighboring towns were noted. West Boylston is one of the closest examples.
- CBH suggested that prior to the next SFC meeting, that the SFC meet with MassDEP to begin discussions with them for informational purposes. CBH noted that MassDEP had told the Waste & Recycling Committee that they’d like to meet with the town about any potential solar development at the former landfill site. JM agreed that such a meeting could be beneficial especially in establishing good relations and cooperative working relationship. Members agreed for CBH to reach out to MassDEP’s Jim McQuade to set up such an informational meeting, with a goal of holding it at next SFC meeting on 11/16 at 2p. CBH suggested that the Board of Health—as the authority in charge of the landfill post-closure maintenance—also be invited. Members agreed.
 - o **ACTION:** CBH to reach out to MassDEP’s Jim McQuade to set up such an informational meeting, with a goal of holding it at next SFC meeting on 11/16 at 2p. CBH to advise members and Board of Health as to meeting date and time.
- JM noted the mission of the SFC as outlined in the charge given by the Selectboard includes assisting the Selectboard and the Town Counsel with regard to this project. JM offered to reach out to the Town Counsel to inquire whether he has items he would like the SFC to focus on. Members agreed this was a good idea.
 - o **ACTION:** JM to reach out to the Town Counsel to inquire whether he has items he would like the SFC to focus on.

Future Meeting Schedule

- Members discussed a future meeting schedule and agreed to the Third Thursday of each month at 2p virtually. CBH noted that in-person meetings and evening meetings would allow for greater accessibility to the public, as well as collaboration and accountability. JM suggested that SFC meet as best for member schedules but that SFC could plan to host evening public hearings as appropriate during various stages of progress on the project.
- **NEXT MEETING:** November 16, 2023 at 2p virtually via Zoom (link to be provided by RC).
- GP left the meeting at 12:08pm.
- Meeting adjourned with unanimous consent at 12:10pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Corey Burnham-Howard