

**Hartford Planning Commission**  
**Norwich Solar Braley Dr. proposed solar array**  
**Draft Minutes**  
**August 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023**

Planning Commission vice chair Bruce Reid called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. He followed by reading the hybrid meeting script and conducting a roll call.

Attendance: The following individuals attended the meeting which was held at the Hartford Town Hall in Room 1 at 171 Bridge Street in White River Junction on Wednesday, August 9th, 2023.

The meeting was also available remotely and several people participated that way.

Planning Commission & Town Plan Steering Committee Members:

Bruce Reid Planning Commission, term expires 2/7/25

Dillon Kries, Planning Commission, term expires 6/26/26

Dillon Bianchi, Planning Commission, term expires 9/5/25 (attended virtually)

Toby Dayman, Planning Commission, term expires 6/28/24

John Heath, Planning Commission, term expires 3/22/24

Colin Butler, Planning Commission, term expires 7/12/24

Kim Souza, Select Board Liaison (attended virtually)

Absent:

John Reid, Planning Commission, term expires 1/11/24

Staff:

Dana Clawson, Environmental Sustainability Coordinator

Jo-Ann Ells, Zoning Administrator, Department of Planning and Development

Others Present:

Geoff Martin, Norwich Solar

Martha Staskus, Norwich Solar

Jesse Pollard, Energy Commission, term expires 12/13/24

Roger Bloomfield, Sterling Springs Development

Susan Bloomfield, Sterling Springs Development

Nancy Bean, Sterling Springs Development  
Jim Fortmuller, Sterling Springs Development  
Lydia Taylor, Sterling Springs Development  
Julia Trotter, Sterling Springs Development  
Gail Clauson, Sterling Springs Development  
Sally Bellow, Sterling Springs Development  
Rich Jurgens, Sterling Springs Development  
Carol Williams-Suich, Sterling Springs Development  
Margaret Fanning, Sterling Springs Development

Bruce Riddle opened the meeting by stating that there was one application, Norwich Solar's request for a site on Braley Dr. to be deemed as preferred for a 500 kW solar array, and that this was a special meeting.

Dana Clawson explained that this meeting was a continuation of a June meeting where the Planning Commission asked Norwich Solar to speak with the owner of the parcel where the array will be installed for some assurance that the array will continue to be well screened and not seen, specially that it will not be in the line of site of the residents of Sterling Springs residence. Dana also explained that this meeting was to decide if the Planning Commission would grant the location a preferred siting designation, which is required along with Select Board and Regional Planning Commission deeming the site as preferred, for Norwich Solar to submit an application to the Public Utilities Commission. Norwich Solar would then go through a 9 month or so permitting process with the Public Utilities Commission.

Geoff Martin and Martha Staskus then spoke about the proposed site, it would be a 500 kW array that would connect to a phase 3 power line that runs along Christian St. and would generate enough electricity to serve approximately 135 Vermont homes. The array will be net metered.

Geoff and Martha then explained that there will be tree cutting around the array to avoid the array from being shaded. There is 430 feet of trees between the Sterling Springs development and the array and the natural topography of the area would prevent the array from being visible. The Public Utilities requires a 50 foot buffer between arrays of this size and abutting properties. The limit of disturbance, or the area that will be impacted by the building and ongoing operation of the system, is 12.6 acres, the array itself is 2.5 acres and the total parcel is 36 acres.

Collin Butler then referred to the minutes of the last meeting and that one of the things that was requested was that Norwich Solar speak with Steve Davis, the parcel owner, about assurances that he wouldn't cut the trees that screen the system, Martha said they had a conversation and that Mr. Davis asked if that meant that he couldn't develop the rest of the property and build homes on the remaining land. Collin then pointed out that if Mr. Davis was to put homes on the remaining land they would not have much of a buffer between them and the array.

Geoff Martin was then asked why he thought this was a good site for a solar array, he answered that it is in line with the Town Plan, it has good solar resources, there are no known Agency of Natural Resources constraints on the area, no wetland or endangered plants, and it is close to phase 3 power line to connect to.

Geoff Martin also referenced the Town plan goal to have 90% of the energy used in Town come from renewable energy by 2040 and to have net zero emissions by 2030. Collin Butler then pointed out that the Vermont Law School guide to the preferred siting process has a footnote that whomever owns the Renewable Energy Certificates (REC's) has the right to claim the energy that is generated from a project. There was then a discussion on how developing solar in Hartford and who gets credit for the renewable energy appears to be, in Collin's words, "two separate mutually exclusive things". This led to a discussion on how solar arrays in Hartford create local energy from renewable sources, however if Green Mountain Power purchases those credits and retires them in Vermont, which according to Marth Staskus they are legally required to do, this then lowers the overall carbon footprint of Vermont's energy portfolio.

Tobey Dayman then asked that Norwich Solar clarify where housing could still be developed on the parcel, they responded that it would be outside the white dotted line around the array. Toby then asked about fencing, Martha assured him that there would be a fence that meets national electric code and would still allow for wild life to pass through. Fences are typically back 6x6 wire fences.

The discussion then moved on to how the topography and elevations in the area will naturally keep the array out of site and that a full ascetic, historic, environmental and an electrical assessment of the site will be required by the Public Utilities Commission as part of the application process. That application is also provided to the Planning Commission, Select Board, and the Regional Planning Commission and there is a 30 day comment period at the start of the application process.

Geoff Martin was then asked who was going to receive credit for the energy that would be produced from this array, Geoff responded that it is too early in the project to have a project owner and that who benefits from the solar being created will be decided at a later time as the project gets close to being operational.

Collin Butler then asked about the Energy Commission's letter of support for the project, Jesse Pollard, the Energy Commission Chair then read the letter of support. Jesse then explained the conversation that the Energy Commission had just prior to voting to sign the letter, during

that Energy Commission meeting Renewable Energy Certificates, what should be required for review at such an early stage, should the Energy Commission request a walk of the site when that's not a common request for other development, and what agency the Energy Commission has given that it is not recognized as an intervening body by the PUC. During this earlier meeting the Energy Commission also discussed what constitutes a forest and how they should get a definition of what a forest is in the future Town Plan.

The meeting then turned to public comment.

Roger Bloomfield, Sterling Spring's Development, said that in Sterling Springs everyone has an individual meter and the power from the Braley Dr. array wouldn't be of interest to him. He also said that according to the Town Plan the array is in the middle of land that is likely to be developed for housing and he thinks the solar array is contrary to that goal.

Carol Williams-Suich, Sterling Springs Development, stood up to say she supports the project and doesn't think it will be visible from any angle.

Sally Bellow, Sterling Springs Development, stood to say she supports the project and is impressed by the Planning Commission's due diligence.

Lydia "Posie" Taylor, Sterling Springs Development, stood to say she is not opposed to the project but was concerned about water runoff. She stated the area appears to slope away from Sterling Springs but wanted Norwich Solar to confirm this. Martha responded that water from the site is likely to run away from Sterling Springs and that any development over half an acre, which this project is, is required to have a stormwater plan. Grindings from the tree's that are cut during the install will also be used to create berms and direct water flow.

Rich Jurgens, Sterling Springs Development, stood up to support the project.

Margaret Fanning, Sterling Springs Development, stood up to support the project.

Bruce Reid, Vice Chair of the Planning Commission, then commented that when the 30 day comment period starts it will be important for Town staff to get the application to the Planning Commission and Select Board ASAP as it will likely be 600-700 pages.

Collin Butler then made a motion "for the approval of a preferred site designation for the Norwich Solar Braley Dr. site". Dillon Kreis seconded the motion.

Roll call:

Bruce Reid voted in favor of the motion.

Dillon Kries voted in favor of the motion.

Dillon Bianchi voted in opposition to the motion.

Toby Dayman voted in favor of the motion.

John Heath voted in favor of the motion.

Colin Butler voted in favor of the motion.