

**Draft Minutes
November 30, 2020**

**HARTFORD PLANNING COMMISSION
RAYS WAY SOLAR APPLICATION BY HARTFORD RAY WAY, LLC**

**THIS MEETING WAS CONDUCTED IN COMPLIANCE WITH
THE VERMONT OPEN MEETING LAW
WITH ELECTRONIC PARTICIPATION**

Commissioners Attending: Bruce Riddle, John Reid, Toby Dayman, Robin Adair Logan, Dillon Bianchi, Dave Sherman, and Dennis Brown.

Staff Attending: Lori Hirshfield, Planning Director, Matt Osborn, Town Planner, Jo-Ann Ells, Zoning Administrator.

Public Attending: Lisa Vose, William Soule, Erin Nott, Martha McDaniel, Toby Kravitz and Jon Bouton.

Bruce Riddle read the Act 92 script required to hold a remote meeting and took roll call.

Bruce Riddle noted that the purpose of the meeting was to review an application submitted to the Vermont Public Utility Commission (PUC) by Hartford Ray Way Solar, LLC seeking approval of a 150-kW photovoltaic group net-metering system at 406 Rays Way in West Hartford, Vermont.

Dave Sherman asked if the Commission was limited to their standard review criteria. Jo-Ann Ells explained that they were not because the Commission is commenting on the application and not acting on it.

Bruce Riddle reminded the Commission that this summer the Commission sent a joint letter with the Selectboard to the PUC supporting this location as a “preferred site.”

Martha McDaniel, Hartford Energy Commission (HEC) noted that HEC had worked hard on the Energy Chapter of the Town Plan. She noted while HEC and Plan supports solar, she had not seen the application and could not offer comment. She noted that she believed the site was on agricultural soils and that concerns with views had been expressed by neighbors.

Lori Hirshfield noted that this past summer, the Planning Commission and Selectboard identified the site on Rays Way as a “Potential Suitable Site” for solar energy.

Bruce Riddle noted that the application addressed mitigation of the agricultural soils.

Martha McDaniel reviewed the criteria for preferred sites as outlined in the Town Plan.

Lori Hirshfield noted that while a joint letter of support was sent, a permit from the PUC is still required and the Town can comment on the application.

Martha McDaniel asked if the site had been forested and cleared for this purpose. Bruce Riddle responded that according to the application it had not.

Bruce Riddle asked for comments from abutters.

Bill Soule asked about the role of the Commission in the process and if the array was a commercial activity. Bruce Riddle stated that it was not a commercial activity per the town, required approval from the PUC and the Commission's role is to provide comments. Bill Soule asked the Commission to support neighbors' concerns as outlined in their letters and noted that moving the array 100' +/- up the hill would be preferable.

Jo-Ann Ells reviewed comments from staff previously emailed to the Planning Commission.

Dennis Brown noted that he did a site visit and because the array is not staked, found the visit had very little value. Robin Adair Logan concurred and noted that she agreed with staff that a structural engineer should evaluate the condition of the bridge.

John Reid stated that he was concerned with the impact on the character of the area, wildlife and the nearby ponds.

Dave Sherman noted that the area consists of a beautiful hillside with fields. He stated that the array would be surrounded by houses and expressed concern with the effect on the character of the area. He noted that he supports solar energy, but not at the expense of the nearby homeowners.

Dillon Bianchi stated that he agreed with the concerns expressed so far and noted that moving the array may be less impactful on the character of the area.

Toby Dayman suggested that photographs from the interstate and Old River Road be provided noting that additional screening may be needed. He stated that the road may need to be improved for construction.

Bill Soule stated that maintenance of the road has been an issue for years.

Lisa Vose noted that there is a lot of wildlife that crosses the field including deer, turkey and blue heron.

Bruce Riddle expressed frustration with the lack of information in the application.

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Erin Nott thanked the Commission for their comments. She noted that it is a beautiful area and that the site will be in direct view and is concerned about the impact on wildlife. She believes there is a better location on the Bettis' land.

Matt Osborn described the location of a nearby deeryard.

Robin Adair Logan stated that she would not worry about the view from I-89. She noted the importance of addressing Co2 emissions and the need for alternative energy. She stated that as a solution, the arrays could be moved to another location on the property.

Bruce Riddle stated that he would work with staff on a memo outlining the Commission's concerns for the Selectboard.

Dillon Bianchi asked that information regarding the lifespan of the panels and decommissioning plan be provided.

The Commission adjourned at 6:55PM.

Respectively Submitted,

Toby Dayman, Clerk