

Blue Hill Planning Board
February 8th, 2023 – Meeting Minutes

Location

Blue Hill Town Hall, 18 Union Street, Blue Hill, ME

Attendance

Present: Mary Alice Hurvitt (chair), Scott Blanchard (vice chair), Matthew Martin, Gavin Riggall, Marcia McKeague, Wilson King, Emily Cushman, Bryce Farnham (CEO), Aga Dixon (Town Attorney)

Public: Tony Yonnone (SolAmerica), Tom Daniels (TRC), Stephen Wagner (SolAmerica Attorney), Mary Glassanos, George Crampton, Butler Smythe, Karen Frangoulis, Matt Dennison (Blue Hill Fire Chief), Scott Miller, John Bates, Rachel Randall, Jason Young, Maggie White (Press), Chris Guinness, George Howe, David Putnam, Julie J. Fehrle, William Rand, Bill Loomis, Clifton Page, David Gutcheon, Laura Markham, Dana Leighton

Remote: Sharon Thompson, Katie Kearney (SolAmerica), Ryan Peters (SolAmerica), Matt Short, Sean Dooley, Karen Wyatt, Nina Fleming

The meeting began at 5:32pm and a quorum was recognized - 7 board members were present, alternate member Matthew Martin, was voting in place of board member Sergei Breus.

Discussion: The Board reviewed and approved the minutes from the January 11th, 2023 meeting.

Motion: Marcia motioned to approve the meeting minutes from January 11th. Scott seconded. Approved 7-0.

Motion: Scott motioned to reopen the public hearing. Emily seconded. Approved 7-0.

The public hearing was reopened at 5:33pm.

Mary Alice explained the purpose of the public hearing and asked to keep the comments brief and relevant to the new information that was presented by SolAmerica. The Board has taken into consideration all of the concerns from abutters and other members of the public regarding this project.

Tony Yonnone, SolAmerica's project manager gave his testimony regarding the status of the application. Tony states that when installing solar projects such as this one, there are many benefits to the community. This solar project would benefit all those who utilize the subscriber program. Versant Power confirmed with SolAmerica via telephone that this project would not create any future rejection to residential solar installation. He asked that the public to mend their relationship with the Hester's regardless of the outcome of this project.

Tom Daniels, TRC Engineer for SolAmerica, took the floor to go over the new materials that were submitted by SolAmerica on January 27, 2023. Tom explained that there will be no increase to the water runoff rate, after the solar farm is installed due to the vegetation management that will be taking place as the solar panels are installed. The fence surrounding the solar farm is what they call "wildlife permeable" which would allow small animals to travel under the fence but will keep out larger wildlife. The wildlife biologist on the TRC team did determine that the proposed project area is not a deer

wintering habitat. The state does not require any further preservation measures for vernal pools if the proposed project is disturbing less than 25% of the designated area and its buffer zone.

Kristin Collins, attorney for abutters, questioned why SolAmerica's resubmittal of information was in a different name. It appears as "Hancock County ME S2, LLC (dba SolAmerica Energy, LLC)". Kristin Collins suggested the Board start the review process over, due to the new submittal being from a different entity. Kristin said the beauty of solar farms is that there is no precise configuration that the panels need to be placed. There are options for reconfiguration that should be considered to avoid wetlands. Kristin has not received the letter back from Maine Historic Preservation yet and would like the Board to review that before making a final decision. Kristin noted the discrepancies between the cultural resource review which stated an 8.5-acre project area but the applicant is stating an 11-acre project area. There is concern over whether the fire department is equipped to handle solar farm fires. Kristin suggested that the Town shouldn't rely on the state for the decommissioning plan, she would like to see the Town as a guarantor on a performance guarantee along with the property owners.

Blue Hill Fire Chief, Matt Dennison said he had talked to several other fire chiefs in the state regarding solar farm fires. He stated that the location of the proposed solar farm would be easily accessible by the fire department and that within that area there are 7 water sources for the fire department to utilize. He did not express any concerns about the Town's ability to deal with a fire at the site.

Several members of the public had the opportunity to speak. Tom Daniels of TRC responded to some of the public's concerns on behalf of SolAmerica.

SolAmerica had the opportunity to rebut any comments or questions that were made by the public. Tony Yonnone of SolAmerica explained why there was a different name on the application when they submitted additional information. Hancock County ME S2, LLC holds all assets pertaining to this specific project. Having a separate entity for this specific project is mainly for finance and organizational purposes.

Board member Wilson King asked the reasoning for changing engineering firms from Sebago Technics (which were the engineers for the original application) to TRC. Tony explained it was simply because this project was not moving along as fast as others and Sebago had moved forward with other projects. Wilson also asked about the timeline of when and who approached who to start this project. Tony stated that SolAmerica reached out to the property owners in January of 2020 and reached an agreement in April of 2020. Mary Alice asked where the closest operator would be coming from in case of an emergency. Tony clarified that local first responders would be able to access the panels and transformers in case of an emergency.

Motion: Wilson moved to close the public hearing. Mary Alice seconded. Approved 7-0.

Public hearing was closed at 7:56pm.

The Planning Board deliberated on each of the review criteria in Section 6 of the Commercial Site Plan Review Ordinance.

The Board tabled the deliberation until a date selected by the chair. No motions were taken during the discussion.

Motion: Scott moved to continue deliberation to a date selected by the chair. Emily seconded. Approved 7-0.

Motion: Mary Alice moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:32pm. Matt seconded. Approved 7-0.

Next Meeting: March 8th, 2023

Signed:  _____ Date: 3/8/23

