

Town of Shaftsbury Planning Commission

March 27, 2024

In person at Cole Hall and remotely via Zoom

1) Call to order

The meeting came to order at 6:03 p.m. Everyone present introduced themselves: on the planning commission, Zoe Contros Kearn, Mike Foley, Emily Cowperthwaite, Nancy Burns (chair), and Mike Albus; Bennington County Regional Commission (BCRC) planner Samantha Page; zoning administrator Shelly Stiles; and in the audience Linda Marsha, Annie Witten Smith, James Pullman, and Ronald Nadeau. Other were also present via Zoom.

2) Approval of minutes, March 13, 2024

Mr. Albus moved to approved the outstanding minutes. Mr. Foley seconded the motion, which passed 5-0-0.

3) Hearing, Enhanced Energy Plan (EEP)

Ms. Burns introduced the hearing. She noted that minor changes will be needed to the text – as regards “shall” versus “should” language, and changing decibel limits referenced to be consistent with those used by the Public Utility Commission. More significantly, it has been discovered that a couple of state-required matters still need to be covered.

Ms. Page elaborated. She began by describing the EEP process – that it was initiated in response to a solar proposal, that it was led by BCRC and presented to the public in August 2023, that its goal is to provide the Town with increased or “due” deference by the PUC in the future. The Plan also covers current energy use, possible energy reductions in the future, some policy recommendations, and some results of a public survey and public discussions.

New state standards require the Plan to also address equity, e.g. how its impacts might affect certain populations, and use of forest resources. (The forest section might reference sites, number of acres, or other items. A statement should be made that the issue was discussed no matter the outcome of the discussion. Limiting cutting to five acres came up again and again in the discussion. Joe Altobell on Zoom said he wouldn’t ever exchange a tree for a solar panel.) Ms. Page said BCRC planner Callie Fishburn would be in charge of suggesting these changes.

Ron Nadeau, owner of a farm on Myers Road at Bennett Hill Road, said he hopes to build a community solar farm on about fifty acres he owns there.

Ms. Contros Kearn said large urban areas offer more opportunities for aesthetically neutral solar arrays, such as roofs. She said that, to the extent the EEP reduces the possibility of large scale solar, it will also make it more likely than any renewable energy generated here stays here. Tom Smith said via Zoom that we aren’t going to solve the climate crisis but we will change the look of the Town. We have more exposure to such impacts than neighboring towns such as Dorset. Mr. Albus suggested citizens could volunteer to map aesthetically significant areas where solar should not be allowed. Those areas could then be regulated. Mr. Foley suggested using the Quechee test’s “average person” criterion to comment on sites if and when development is proposed for them.

4) Other business

Mr. Foley moved to adjourn at 7:14 p.m. Mr. Albus seconded the motion, which passed 5-0-0.