

RPC_Minutes_2018.12.4

Members Present:

Mark Wood

Jim Rikert

Geo Honigford

Bushrod Powers

Stuart Levasseur

Nell Gwin

Sarah Danly

The RPC Meeting was called to order at 6:07 pm by Stuart Levasseur, Chair.

Proposed community solar project preferred site designation

Members of the Energy Clinic at Vermont Law School attended to discuss a community solar project they are working on within Royalton and begin a conversation with the Planning Commission about designating the location as Preferred Site.

Attendees from the Energy Clinic: Jeannie Oliver, Kevin Jones, Nicole Lepre, Charlie Spence, Candace Pearson, Austin Anderson

- The VLS Energy Clinic, BALE, and Putting Down Roots Farm are working on a plan for a community solar facility on Putting Down Roots Farm's property.
 - The Energy Clinic attendees shared a packet of information about the project, including a map of the proposed location on the farm. The proposed location is on a slope not being used for agricultural production.
 - The owners will be paid the rent in electricity. In other projects about 5% of the net metering revenues go to the local farmers. In this case the landowners are interested in being part owners of the array as well.
- They have been working with Catamount as the developer. Because he occasionally works for Catamount, RPC member Geo Honigford recused himself from the discussion.
- They are interested in eventually getting the project site designated as a preferred site via a joint Letter of Support from the Selectboard, Planning Commission, and Regional Planning Commission.
 - This letter would express support for the site as a preferred site but is not a position on any other compliance requirements or the project as a whole. The Planning Commission would reserve the right to file letters of complaint at other stages in the process.

- While the Energy Clinic is bringing this to the attention of the RPC at this time, they plan to seek neighboring landowner's approval before returning to the RPC, Selectboard, and TRORC to request the Joint Letter.
- In the new net metering rules there are two avenues for designating preferred sites. One is designating them in the Town Plan. The other way is the joint letter of support from the Selectboard, Town Planning Commission, and Regional Planning Commission.
 - Attendees from the Energy Clinic pointed out to the Commission that designating sites in the Town Plan results in complete parcels or swathes of land being designated, where a letter of support for a specific project allows more specificity with regards to the property.
- If the site is not designated as preferred there is a 3c per kW Hr penalty but if it is preferred there is a 1c per kW Hr bonus.
- The RPC heard more detail about the history of the project, which had been proposed several years ago before GMP met its net metering cap and the project could not continue at that time.
- The proposed timeline is to have a consultation process in January and to file the CPG application in May of next year.
 - The Planning Commission feels this timeline works well with its own timeline as it will be meeting with TRORC starting in January to update the Town Plan, and as part of that process will be creating an energy plan.
- The proposal is for a community solar array, where households can buy into a certain amount of energy generation. The planned size would generate enough energy for approximately 30 households, which brings the price down for community members but is still community-scale rather than commercial-scale. There are a few local businesses that are interested and they may attempt a mix of several local businesses plus approx. 20 homes.
- The attendees from the Energy Clinic answered a number of questions from the Planning Commission about the details of the project:
 - The lease on the land will be for 25 years but participating households will own the solar equipment.
 - Buying in on a community solar array is usually somewhat cheaper than doing an array on a rooftop due to economies of scale – company has to deal with contracts and permits for only one site rather than 30 separate houses. Families will also have the option to buy in at different sizes.
 - Next steps include working with Green Mountain Power, which is maxed out in some areas.

The Planning Commission further discussed several aspects of the project:

- This will also affect taxes. Is Putting Down Roots in current use? Listers will increase PDR taxes. The Town will be getting tax revenue for equipment but also more for the land under it.
- Members discussed that this is a convoluted system for individual families, with the complicated regulations and process around net metering rather than allow individual households to directly use the energy their solar panels are generating. But members of the PC also acknowledge that this community array is a way to work within the existing system.

- The main thing Commission members are concerned about is the opinions of the neighbors. The Commission would like to hear from the neighbors before considering supporting it as a preferred site.
- Members discussed to what extent the preferred site designation is important to the project. Until the update of the Town Plan, the project would be able to go forward whether or not the Planning Commission gives support. However, the Planning Commission interpreted from the presentation that the 4cent/kW hr is likely to make a significant difference in the financial feasibility of the project.
- The Commission raised the question of where the town stands in terms of meeting renewable energy goals. Several questions about the state energy goals and what counts towards them, were raised and will be explored further during development of the energy plan.
- The Commission also discussed the plan for the end of life of this solar array. Again several questions were raised that will be easier to answer after beginning the energy plan.

This was a preliminary presentation by the Energy Clinic and they are not yet requesting the Letter of Support; instead they will be returning in the spring after talking with GMP, the neighbors, and other stakeholders. No vote was needed.

Minutes;

The Commission reviewed two sets of draft minutes, 2018.10.02 and 2018.09.07. Geo Honigford moved to approve both sets, Mark Wood seconded. There was no discussion and the Commission voted to approve both sets.

The Art Grant:

Nell Gwin and Sarah Danly have had several meetings with other town residents about applying for the Vermont Arts Council Animating Infrastructure grant, and Nell has drafted a Letter of Intent, which is due December 10.

- The group of interested residents brainstormed several ideas and settled on the underpass by the library.
- Nell and Sarah are working on the Letter of Intent and concurrently working on other pieces like contacting the railroad.
- The Commission discussed the logistics of working with the railroad on this. The team applying for the grant has considered several ideas that minimize the extent to which the railroad needs to be involved. Stuart Levasseur offered a potential contact from another successful project.
- If the Lol is accepted, the team will hear back in mid January with an invitation to apply.
- Nell will also attend the upcoming Selectboard meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 7:15

Meeting notes respectfully submitted by Sarah Danly, clerk.

