

Northfield Energy Committee Meeting Minutes  
December 19, 2023. 6:00pm  
Town Hall

Present: Judy Wagner, Co-chair  
Jim VanNatta, Co-chair  
Andrew Vernon  
Spirit Joseph  
Seth Hansell, Secretary

*In attendance: members of the planning board:*  
Joe Graveline  
Michelle Wood  
Steve Seredynski  
*Joanne McGee, open space*

1. Review Minutes from November 12th meeting tabled until the end of the meeting
2. Solar Planning Project updates and next steps
  - 2.1. We were one of 10 towns to spearhead this project through UMass Energy Extension and were not 100% sure what the goals or expectations were, we were quite happy with some of the ideas that came out of this project
    - 2.1.1. Northfield's size and population was taken into consideration and the recommendations were aimed directly at us
    - 2.1.2. Solar zoning was part of a long term commitment that we made towards the commonwealth when we became a Green community and it is not clear that we have met these commitments at this point.
    - 2.1.3. Points of interest from the document
      - 2.1.3.1. Information about where the protected agriculture land is included in the report
      - 2.1.3.2. Information about where the three-phase lines are located is included in the report
      - 2.1.3.3. Intent is to inform solar by-laws and permitting/zoning for the town
      - 2.1.3.4. Needs to be approved by the town before we get the report into final form for widespread distribution
      - 2.1.3.5. According to a survey:
        - 2.1.3.5.1. Northfield residents are in support of solar

- 2.1.3.5.2. Northfield residents feel that it is important to combat climate change
- 2.1.3.5.3. Especially in support of using developed sites (residences, parking lots, disturbed lands, etc.)
- 2.1.3.5.4. Not interested in developing forest, natural meadows or prime farmland
- 2.1.3.6. Northfield would need 29 Megawatts to be self-sufficient (residential, commercial and governmental)
  - 2.1.3.6.1. For reference: 1.9 Megawatts is generated by the Northfield mountain facility
- 2.1.3.7. The report didn't discuss dual-use of land (so called "agri-solar")
- 2.1.4. Comment: Solar developers are not officially utility companies
- 2.1.5. Current Use for municipal buildings: 383 MWh annually
- 2.1.6. Three-phase line is mostly saturated and can't support a large increase in electrical production. "The grid can't take it" without significant additional infrastructure.
- 2.2. We still need to go through this report and help them make corrections
- 2.3. Spirit: We are still looking at the report and trying to figure out what we want to do with it
- 2.4. People are walking around private property with clipboards and there is a concern that developers have started looking at properties labeled in particular ways
- 2.5. Is the report public? We don't think so, but there might be a concern that information contained within has been shared, despite the fact that it has errors.
- 2.6. Comment that there was a fairly small number of actual respondents to the survey
- 2.7. Report from Easthampton/Northampton River Valley Co-op discusses the advantages and issues associated with their attempt to become energy self-sufficient
- 2.8. Comment: Turning forested and natural land into solar would be a shame.
- 2.9. Comment: 80,000 toxic sites (brownfields) have been found by the federal government which they would be willing to help clean up for the purpose of converting into solar fields.
- 2.10. Are there ways to get grants for municipal entities to put in solar on pre-existing structures? There should be.
- 2.11. PVRS is not owned by the town, but would be a huge advantage if we could use that space for solar over parking lots, etc



- 2.11.1. We would need to break up the math and see if other towns would be willing to participate.
- 2.11.2. This whole process takes so long, that even though the three-phase is overburdened, it might be good to get started on this process.
- 2.12. Comment: Currently developers need to pay for studies, but that incentivizes the studies to find results that support developers interests.
  - 2.12.1. Independent funding is important to get real engineering assessments.
- 2.13. Questions and comments about the report:
  - 2.13.1. Are we using the report as a roadmap or just as a scaffolding for thinking about this process?
    - 2.13.1.1. We don't believe this is "our map" and doesn't fully align with our interests, but it does have a lot of good information
    - 2.13.1.2. The 2013 Open Space report seems to parrot our concerns that we are still talking about today.
  - 2.13.2. What is the solar overlay district on the map from the report?
    - 2.13.2.1. Flat spaces are being created privately which could be used for this which might help the state meet its goals, but there is no requirement for it to be used in this way.
    - 2.13.2.2. The town was required to create this zone by the state which effectively abrogated some of the town's ability to stop solar development in this region.
    - 2.13.2.3. Would expanding this zone be something to consider?
      - 2.13.2.3.1. Northfield is fertile farmland pinched between forested ridges, so it seems to be tight and might not be a good idea to increase solar zoning.
      - 2.13.2.3.2. Open space is one of the town's primary resources and impacting this by increasing large solar arrays would probably be something the town wouldn't support, at least given previous town votes as a guide.
  - 2.13.3. What is the next thing to do?
    - 2.13.3.1. Helping residents who wish to add solar find support.
    - 2.13.3.2. Getting solar at the High School where we would be partial owners and beneficiaries of that solar.
    - 2.13.3.3. What are our action steps?
      - 2.13.3.3.1. Hiring a consultant
        - 2.13.3.3.1.1. Finding funding
      - 2.13.3.3.2. Having a set of priorities helps any consultant

- 2.13.3.4. Getting the news out about good/bad solar purchase/leasing options for residents.
    - 2.13.3.4.1. Comment: Cost of energy is going up and up, taking some kind of loan to build the infrastructure may well be worth it, particularly if you can budget it for a municipality.
    - 2.13.3.4.2. Comment: the State allows farmers to generate 200% of their energy use.
  - 2.13.3.5. Share this information with the general public who might be interested in privately generating electricity. A "Solar Fair".
    - 2.13.3.5.1. Lots of new information and technology has changed since the last fair
  - 2.13.3.6. Incentives that exist are typically grabbed by developers which leave little for municipalities and the time frame which they need.
  - 2.13.3.7. Comment: MGL 40A Zoning Law introduced and discussed in terms of how it might be used to keep larger developers from over developing in Northfield
3. Green Communities Grant Update
- 3.1. 2023 Proposal - incentive update
    - 3.1.1. Eversource eventually did give us a small incentive on the order of \$11,000 which we were able to include in the Green Communities grant proposal.
  - 3.2. Annual Report Update
    - 3.2.1. The report is now all on-line and we can see the old data some of which it looks that we can update
      - 3.2.1.1. Town vehicles need to be updated, and requirements need to be communicated to other town committees and departments.
4. Presentation to Town Committees and Board
- 4.1. Meeting with Andrea - Summary
    - 4.1.1. How can we get the information regarding the Green Communities requirements to the various town entities who will be purchasing vehicles in the future.
    - 4.1.2. Interested in updating our 5-year plan
      - 4.1.2.1. Do we need a consultant to do this?
    - 4.1.3. Decarbonization grant which requires a 25% match is up to \$500k (\$125k investment from the town).



- 4.2. Other Meetings needed and Next steps
  - 4.2.1. Need to get this information about how much we have saved by spending on these energy projects out to the people who will ultimately make the decisions about town investments (town meeting, board, etc?)
5. Elementary School
  - 5.1. Geo-thermal (Ground source heat pumps) discussed as a possible source for energy savings.
    - 5.1.1. Closed-loop wells would be what is needed, but the cost quickly increased to a point which makes it unreasonable at this point in time
    - 5.1.2. Incentives may be higher, which would bring heat-source back into the conversation.
    - 5.1.3. A lot will depend on the current cycle of the Green Communities grant
    - 5.1.4. Going forward, we will need to help decide if we will go towards a number of smaller air-source heat pump zones or a larger, full school heating/cooling system which would either be ground or air-source heat pumps.
6. Aggregation Updates
  - 6.1. New rates did come out from Eversource and postcards we believe were sent out to all residents which should help people know what will happen if they do/don't want changes to their aggregation status.
  - 6.2. We will see if we can get that information on the town website which is currently blank.
7. Minutes from the meeting on November 12th amended and approved unanimously.

Next meeting set for Jan 16th

Approved 1/16/2024