

**NORTHFIELD PLANNING BOARD
THURSDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2020
REGULAR MEETING - 4:00PM
STANLEY WICKEY PAVILION, TOWN HALL, NORTHFIELD
MEETING MINUTES**

Members Present: Chair Stephen Seredynski (SS), Joe Graveline (JG), Tammy Pelletier (TP), Meg Riordan (MR); Homer Stavely (HS)

Members Absent: none

Others in Attendance: none

I. CALL TO ORDER

SS called the meeting to order at 4:02pm. SS welcomed new member, Joe Graveline (JG).

II. APPROVE MINUTES

SS tabled the approval of the previous meeting's minutes. SS reviewed the procedure for submitting approved meeting minutes to the Town Clerk.

III. SUBDIVISION BYLAW REGULATIONS

MR reviewed the Subdivision Bylaw Regulations. She explained the process for reviewing and drafting them, including enlisting FRCOG's help.

To help complete the regulations, specifically the segments covering culs-de-sac, SS is awaiting information on the fire department's ladder truck's turning radius from the Fire Chief. HS noted the possible future purchase of larger ladder trucks, and whether the regulations would accomodate them. A discussion ensued.

JG asked if there is a deadline for approving these regulations. SS and MR explained the approval process, which includes public hearings and the proposed regulations appearing on the Annual Town Meeting warrant.

HS noted the likely controversy over these proposed regulations. He recommended public forums. A discussion ensued.

HS thanked the residents, and Peggy Sloan from FRCOG, who helped draft the proposed regulations.

IV. PRELIMINARY REVIEW OF FIELD ENGINEERING SOLAR PLANS

SS reviewed the project submitted by Four-Star Farm/Hopping Ahead. He noted part of the proposal is to take approximately 130 acres out of Agricultural Restriction in order to site a substantial solar array.

HS asked if these acres were arable land. SS replied: Yes. A discussion ensued on the farmland's recent and current crops. HS stated it's a shame to take good growing land of agricultural use. A discussion ensued on whether land with a solar array can be successfully returned to agricultural use.

SS announced the project's engineers want to come to the Planning Board to explain the project. The L'Etoiles, who own the land, had a meeting with the parcel's abutters, SS added. MR, who lives near the site of the proposed project, was not invited to the meeting because she is not an abutter. MR said some of her friends, who are abutters, were invited. SS asked MR if she received any feedback from these friends/neighbors. MR said, "Not yet," but she will contact some of them.

SS noted this proposal will require a public hearing.

SS gave some background on the parcel, and why Four-Star Farms/Hopping Ahead wants to install a solar array. Hops are growing on some of the land, there's a micro-brewery there, and the brewery's owners want a three-phase electrical system to power their irrigation system and the farm's operations. It is prohibitively expensive for the electric company to provide this system to the company, they claim, SS noted. So, a solution is for them to erect their own solar array to provide three-phase electricity. HS asked if this array will enable the company to separate from the electrical grid, or if the solar array will connect to the grid. SS said he doesn't know, and this is a question for the engineers.

JG explained aspects of solar power relevant to the proposal. He pointed out this project, if approved, will bring almost 1,400 solar panels to this parcel. JG, MR, and SS agreed that this is a substantial solar array. HS recommended, in assessing it, comparing it to other local solar arrays, but everyone agreed this proposed array is much larger. SS noted, for example, the Planning Board approved Five-Point Farm's solar array, but this one is much larger.

HS reported he received commentary from a resident who is concerned about new solar arrays because of possible deforestation, and requested a moratorium on new solar arrays in Northfield. HS asked if the town's zoning regulations reflect the community's values for preservation. SS said the resident's letter came too late for inclusion on the agenda, but the Planning Board will review it under agenda item #6: *Any Topic Not Reasonably Anticipated By The Chair 48 Hours Prior*. A discussion ensued on the Planning Board's process for public hearings, whether current zoning regulations address this proposal, and what happened during the approval process for previous solar arrays.

TP pointed out that all solar arrays sited on 10 or more acres come before the Planning Board, and in the past, residents were supportive of solar arrays.

JG mentioned the solar arrays' federal licenses.

A discussion ensued on the pump project, the Llewellyn solar array, and decommissioning solar arrays.

SS noted the Planning Board has the authority and resources to hire professionals to help with this process.

SS asked the Planning Board members to review this proposal. He said the engineering firm's representatives will appear before the Planning Board at some point, and Board members can ask them technical questions. HS suggested the Planning Board have a professional appear at those meetings to help ask the right questions. MR asked if the next step should be to bring in the project engineers. SS responded: Yes.

A discussion ensued on the abutters' meeting, which, it was pointed out, was invitation-only, and the Planning Board was not invited. Thus, it was concluded, the Planning Board could not even send a

member to the meeting because they did not know the meeting was happening.

V. VIRTUAL PLANNING BOARD MEETINGS AND PUBLIC HEARINGS

A discussion ensued on preparing for the cold weather, whether the Planning Board should meet online or in-person, and options for both types of meetings. SS shared his progress in gathering information to help the Planning Board decide.

Highlights of this discussion included:

Meeting in the Town Hall Auditorium, and COVID-compliant considerations for doing so.

Audio/technical concerns for meeting in-person, online, and hybrid models (where some Board members and other attendees meet in-person, and the meeting is broadcast online and on BNCTV so others can attend remotely).

Current Massachusetts limits for in-person group gatherings.

The Pioneer Valley High School's cafeteria as a possible meeting space.

Hiring a professional to manage online/hybrid meetings.

Hiring BNCTV to broadcast online meetings.

The challenges of distribution or displaying supporting documents during online/hybrid meetings.

How different meeting types will accommodate those with accessibility challenges.

Northfield's COVID status.

SS committed to contacting Town Administrator Andrea Llamas to learn more about options for winter meetings and public hearings.

VI. ANY TOPIC NOT REASONABLY ANTICIPATED BY THE CHAIR 48 HOURS PRIOR

SS announced he received a letter (alluded to earlier by HS) from a concerned resident. He distributed copies of it to the Planning Board members.

A discussion ensued on the solar proposal and potential meetings and public hearings.

MR asked how to respond to citizen communications.

JG noted the Planning Board has more resources than the average citizen to ask good questions.

HS noted the person writing the letter could have knowledge—that the Planning Board does not have—of other pending solar arrays.

A discussion ensued on the relative merits of moratoria: their timing, whether precedent exists, the state's involvement in them.

A discussion ensued on the Planning Board studying the issue of solar arrays, and the Planning Board's responsibility for timing the proposal's review process. HS advocated for starting the study now, specifically to examine the environmental and economic affects of large-scale solar arrays in small, rural communities. SS said he will contact Andrea Llamas.

SS asked the Planning Board members for suggestions on responding to the letter. A discussion ensued on how to respond. SS recorded the suggestions, thanked his colleagues for their ideas, and committed to writing a draft of the response.

MOTION BY MR TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 5:30PM. SS SECONDED.

Respectfully submitted by Wendy M. Levy from minutes taken by Wendy M. Levy

Approves 1/24/2021 [Signature]