



**NORTHFIELD PLANNING BOARD
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2021
PUBLIC HEARING - 4:00PM
REMOTE LOCATION**

**(INITIAL MINUTES APPROVED 3/4/21; REVISED MINUTES APPROVED 5/19/22)
PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES**

Members Present: Chair Stephen Seredynski (SS), Joe Graveline (JG), Meg Riordan (MR), Tammy Pelletier (TP) [arrived at 4:15pm], Homer Stavely (HS)

Others in Attendance: Mike Marsh, Jackie Firsty, Eugene L'Etoile, Bonnie L'Etoile, Iain Ward, Jesse Robertson-DuBois, Rich Riccio, Mike Zimmer, Beth Greenblatt, Tom McDonald, Melissa Gamache, Rich Holshuh, Bee Jacque, Julia Blyth, Don Campbell, Deb Giard, Christopher Kalinowski, and Ann Pervere.

Please note, this attendance list is incomplete.

I. CALL TO ORDER

SS called the meeting to order at 4:01pm.

MR gave a Power Point presentation, which included a list of documents the Planning Board received about the solar array proposals.

SS reviewed the procedures for the three sections of the public hearing, including instructions for when the public may comment.

II. PROJECT A: 612 PINE MEADOW ROAD; MAP 54/LOT A8; BWC OTTER RUN LLC

SS introduced the first proposed project and gave its location on the physical map and the assessor's map.

MR introduced the applicants from Blue Wave Solar.

Mike Marsh from Blue Wave described the company and some of their other local projects.

Jackie Firsty from Blue Wave described some history of this project and how it relates to farming.

Eugene and Bonnie L'Etoile, property owners, introduced themselves.

Iain Ward, a consultant on agricultural services, is working with Blue Wave on the project. He explained his role, which addresses farming this property, including its past uses and the owners' future goals for it. He noted he worked with the state, and the University of Massachusetts, on the plans, and they support it.

Jesse Robertson-DuBois, a farmer and farm manager, is working with the L'Etoiles to farm their land as part of this proposed project.

Planning Board member Tammy Pelletier entered the meeting.

Rich Riccio of Field Engineering shared the site plans for Project A's proposed solar array. He explained details about the array's structure, security features, agricultural use structures, and stormwater runoff mitigation.

Jesse explained his plans to raise sheep on the site: it'll be a year-round hub for his sheep-farming operation, which includes wholesale elements, over-wintering and compost facilities, and a place for summer sheep-farming needs, like rotational grazing and watering. Iain and Jesse explained the proposed area allows maximum area for Jesse's sheep-farming needs. Jesse noted he has comprehensive farming experience beyond sheep, including grass and other crops, and he explained the close relationship between raising sheep and farming grass.

SS asked about future livestock farming plans on the site. Jesse said that while cattle would be suitable there because of the land and the height of the solar panels, the market is not as strong for cattle. However, this land and market viability support poultry farming, and that is what Jesse anticipates will be the first addition.

MR opened the meeting to the Planning Board for their questions.

SS mentioned he received many comments from the public.

SS said he wants more horticultural screening, and buried electrical wires whenever possible, on the site.

HS asked about remote site monitoring. Jackie said there would be round-the-clock monitoring, frequent on-site farming monitors, and a dedicated operations and maintenance team.

HS asked about whether the solar array's battery storage connected to the grid, or was for on-site use. Jackie and Mike Zimmer said state regulations for this type of project require batteries.

HS asked about decommissioning the array and how it will affect archaeological layers. Jackie said Blue Wave will restore the soil back to its original condition, and this project has been sent to the Massachusetts Historical Commission for their review.

JG asked about preparing the road base beneath the gravel driveways, and he asked for specs for the driveways. Rich and Jackie explained the road is made to utility standards, and they explained the associated specs for soil, gravel, and supporting emergency vehicles.

JG asked how many cubic yards of topsoil would be removed. Rich said they have not yet calculated this, but they do not intend to remove topsoil from the site.

JG asked about the driveways going on to more than one array site, and whether this violates segmentation criteria. Mike Zimmer explained how this program complies with state regulations regarding adjacent parcels, and he offered to cite the regulations. A discussion ensued on the segmentation of parcels.

JG asked about "star bursts" on the site plans. Jackie said they are illustrations showing the shade of trees.

MG shared some of the public's questions and comments. These included:

- Maintenance requirements and emergency responses. Jackie said it depends on the type of emergencies and whether local officials, like firefighters, are needed, or if the solar array's owner should respond. Mike Zimmer said there will be a project manager and preventative annual maintenance.
- Time-frame and decommissioning. Jackie said Blue Wave has detailed decommissioning plans, which includes restoration of the site to its original condition, reseeding the soil, and recycling the solar panels' components. Mike Zimmer added that this project does not include changing the land's elevation.

SS, and the consultant the Planning Board hired for this project, Beth Greenblatt, asked for further details on the plans, including those addressing interconnectivity, the access road and the fence, and about the process for approving the plans. Rich said he will submit the revised plans ASAP, and Blue Wave will request waivers for the fence as needed. Jackie noted it will be easy to remove the access road.

HS commented on the future of land in Northfield.

JG asked about long-term plans for the array's ownership, and whether it would be domestic- or foreign-owned. Jackie said Blue Wave is not the long-term owner, but the company will work with the future owner. Mike Zimmer said there is no way to know now who the future owner will be. He explained the federal tax credit details, and how this supported the likelihood of the future owner being a taxpayer. Iain noted the L'Etoiles will be involved in the agricultural portion of the project.

SS opened up the proceedings for questions and comments from the public.

Tom McDonald asked about guidelines for electricians working on this project. Mike Zimmer assured him the work will follow CMR guidelines because it has to. And, for a variety of reasons, the electricians will come from Western Massachusetts.

Melissa Gamache asked a question about the plans for animals grazing on the land. Jesse explained his animal-farming practices and how the animals will likely be disbursed across the three parcels.

Melissa asked about fencing. Jackie noted the fencing plans are included in the public documents.

Melissa asked about the directions in which the panels will tilt. Jackie explained they will tilt to follow the sun.

Rich Holshuh of Brattleboro, who represents the Elnu Abenaki tribe, noted all of Northfield is the Elnu Abenaki homeland. He said statements made in the application are misleading: it is not true that there are no historical buildings on this landscape. He offered to work with the Planning Board, and he noted he has filed these comments with the Town Secretary.

Bee Jacque spoke on behalf of the Historical Commission, a town body appointed by the Selectboard. She said she submitted documents to the Planning Board, and the Historical Commission is interested in projects that change the landscape, especially along the river. Of particular interest to the commission are projects concerning utilities. Bee shared the commission's concerns about the project, and their recommendations, including conducting an archaeological assessment, working with the Elnu Abenaki, and utilizing other local and indigenous resources. She provided the names of some

resources. Jackie said she will contact Bee.

Julia Blyth asked about panel installation and topsoil. Jackie, Mike Zimmer, and Iain explained the structure of the poles supporting the panels, and the topsoil specs for the entire timeline of the project (construction through decommission).

Don Campbell asked about zoning for the project's area. SS and Mike Zimmer confirmed the Planning Board is addressing zoning through a special permit application.

Deb Giard asked about topsoil, road material, dust control, ice mitigation, and whether substances will leach into the groundwater. Rich Riccio detailed the roadway specs, the monitoring plans, and snow and ice removal. He said topsoil will be protected from erosion.

Christopher Kalinowski reported he had emailed the Planning Board a list of 18-20 questions. He asked about the fence's specs, trees, his view and the view of his neighbors, if he can get his property reassessed once the array is installed, if the L'Etoiles can put these arrays somewhere else, and who approves these projects.

He expressed concerns about the value of his property will decline because of its proximity to this array, his children getting into the fields, wild animals, pile drivers, and truck traffic.

SS, Jackie, Rich Riccio, Mike Zimmer, Eugene and Bonnie L'Etoile, and Jesse responded. Their answers included the following:

- The Planning Board decides if this project is approved.
- Specs for fencing, including photos of the proposed fences.
- Specs for, and photos of, the trees, including the tree-watering plan.
- Research has been done on property values near other arrays, and no evidence emerged that property values had decreased.
- This project provides tax benefits for the town, and it preserves the land in agricultural use for at least the next 20 years.
- Siting the project is the landowner's decision, and is partly guided by APR considerations.
- The risk from livestock to children breaking into the farm is lower than it is for them crossing the road.
- There is no electrical risk to humans or livestock.
- All electrical systems will conform to code.
- There are automatic shut-offs for emergencies.
- An explanation of the panels' specs for electricity and chemicals.

SS asked about tree maintenance on the site. Jackie provided specs on the trees and their maintenance.

JG asked about property covenants on the site. Bonnie and Eugene L'Etoile explained how APR covenants apply to their land.

MR shared more questions from attendees:

Copies of 1-line and 3-line documents? Jackie said they submitted those.

Ann Pervere asked about trees, stormwater drainage, stockpiles, firefighters' access, signage, the installation process, and the railroad. Rich Riccio, SS, Jackie, and Mike Zimmer responded. Their answers included the following information:

- Blue Wave completed a stormwater management report.
- Specs on the stormwater management plan.

- Connection plans, access road plans, signage plans, and emergency vehicle plans are filed with the town.
- All revised plans will go to the town.
- The project's construction will include about a month of pile-driving.
- An installation project not requiring pile-driving is possible, depending on conditions.
- There will be construction restrictions attached to the permit.

SS closed public comment on Proposal A.

III. PROJECT B: 0 PINE MEADOW ROAD; MAP 55/LOT B1 AND MAP 54/LOT B5; BWC PINE MEADOW BROOK LLC

SS opened the public hearing on Project B, the second solar array proposal.

Rich Riccio shared the site plan for this proposal and explained some of its details. He noted he submitted a Notice of Intent to the Conservation Commission for all three proposed arrays, and that part of this array is in a flood zone.

JG asked about the waivers the applicants requested. Rich Riccio noted they are part of the special permit.

HS asked what will happen if there is a flood. Rich Riccio pointed out the flood zone on the proposal's maps, and what parts of the array may or may not be affected by a flood.

HS asked if the access roads connect, and if the farms will connect between Array A and Array B. Iain, Rich Riccio, and Nathan L'Etoile explained the location of the extant roads, the L'Etoiles' work on them, and how they interact with the parcels.

Beth asked for more details about the underground electrical conduit. SS advocated for burying wires whenever possible. Mike Zimmer and Rich Riccio said the underground wires are explained in the plan, they pointed out the connection points on the plan's documents, and said they will submit changes that may come as the design process continues.

Beth asked about the location of the access gates. Rich Riccio pointed out the locations on the project's plans.

JG asked if putting fences around each array would fragment wildlife access to the Connecticut River. He noted that currently it is uninterrupted, and that deer, elk, moose, bobcat, and gray and red foxes use the area often. Nathan, Jackie, and Jesse responded with the following information:

- Anecdotal information about wildlife traversing the land.
- That the fences will protect livestock and shouldn't affect wildlife's travels.
- How fences guard against predators.
- Jesse's agricultural practices.

SS opened the hearing to public comments and questions. He asked attendees not to repeat their comments from the hearing on Array A.

Nathan spoke about the project, the land it sits on, that he grew up on this land, the land's history, his family's farming, and environmental considerations.

Bee asked for more detail on digging and disturbance specs for this project. She asked for more information about the aforementioned waiver. Rich Riccio and Jackie explained the waiver and pointed out its details on the project's plans. Updates will come to the Planning Board.

Melissa asked about landscaping and greening, and odor control for livestock. Jackie, Rich Riccio, and Jesse commented on the parcel's geographic and visual specs, and odor control in livestock farming.

Beth commented on the proximity of a well to a concrete pad. Iain explained that safety affected the location of the concrete pad.

SS closed public comments for Array B.

IV. PROJECT C: 0 PINE MEADOW ROAD; MAP 53/LOT E1 AND MAP 54/LOT B7; BWC PINE MEADOW BROOK LLC

SS announced the hearing for Array C, and invited the applicants to describe the project.

Rich Riccio shared site drawings and site plans for the array, and explained some of its details.

SS asked about abutters. Rich Riccio noted on the plans where one abutter's house is located.

JG posed a series of questions and concerns, some of which were related to a US Department of Energy letter:

- Regarding dual use, what is an agricultural/solar tariff generation unit, and why is this valuable to Blue Wave? Jackie repeated the information about the state's incentive to create dual-use projects, and state requirements for them.
- What relationship will Blue Wave have to the project after they sell it? Jackie said the new owners will get the financial incentive.
- How does the project balance solar power and agricultural use? Jackie explained the array's specs versus non-dual-use sites, and how this proposal meets the state's sunlight pasture regulations. She reminded JG that this project got dual-use approval from the state.
- Expressed concern that the solar power production will be prioritized over agricultural use, and will change what is grown on that land. Nathan, Jesse, and Iain replied with information on the viability of different crops, UMASS's research and how it applies to this project, and the advantages of this project.
- Asked about the portion of the contract between the L'Etoiles and Blue Wave that refers to the number of panels on the property. Nathan spoke about the difference between typical solar contracts, and this one, and that the L'Etoiles negotiated this contract to support the agricultural use of their land.
- Asked about the 3MW capacity waiver and the procedure for granting it. He expressed concern about the lack of transparency. Jackie explained the waiver and why it's relevant to a project of this size.
- What is the guarantee that this land will be farmed in the long-term? Mike Zimmer repeated the aspect of this project that requires it to remain in dual-use, as per state regulations.

SS closed Planning Board participation and opened public participation.

Bee referenced the Northfield Farmland Inventory and asked how Array C affects it. She asked about

the relationship between the three arrays. She referenced a letter from Blue Wave's owner about how the project's neighbors will benefit from the project, and she asked what those benefits are. Eugene and Jackie responded with details about the three-phase power supply and how it will benefit the L'Etoiles' farm, and the reliability of electrical service to neighboring homes.

Bee asked if the construction on Array C is different from the construction on Arrays A & B. Jackie explained the difference in the tile in each panel's racks.

Deb asked for details on the decommissioning fund. Jackie said Blue Wave provided detailed decommissioning plans to the town.

Beth made a recommendation to the applicants regarding the path of interconnection.

SS thanked applicants and attendees.

SS announced the next meeting date: Thursday, March 18, at 4pm.

**MOTION BY JG TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 7:59PM. SS SECONDED.
MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.**

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

Approves 5/19/2022



Chair

NORTHFIELD PLANNING BOARD