

Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting Minutes
November 15th, 2018 7:00 p.m.
Northfield Town Hall

Members Present: Jennifer Cox, Chair, Erin Jaworski, Clerk, Shawn Foster, Tim Rogers, Al Dietrich and Vivien Venskowski, administrative assistant.

Absent: Bill Forrest. No members of the public were present.

The Chair opened the business meeting at 7:10 pm and read the public hearing meeting notice. She requested the applicant do a presentation.

Tom Strunto handed out a presentation “Dual Harvest Sites” by RC Cubed. He stated this project is in conjunction with the University of Massachusetts. The dual purpose involves solar and agriculture use. The crops will be green bean, kale etc. UMass will be overseeing the project and receive production reports. The trackers will be ~10 feet tall, single access and track east and west. The table top can be raised to 12 feet if necessary for plowing/tilling. There is a well on the property to provide water for crops. The project requires all the land requested be utilized to make the project feasible so a variance is requested for setback issue. The setback requested would be 50 feet on two sides and 40 feet on two sides. The plan project is a 1.3 DC Project on 3.8 acres, total land 5 acres. The lease with landowner would be for 20 years, with an additional 5 year option.

The project would put more power back into the grid to reduce risk of outages and anticipated to be part of the SMART Program. The panels would be removed if decommissioned. There is a 6-month window to remove. The land would be returned to its original state. The house is approximately 700 yards away and 3 Acre Farm Road is between the project and house. The far western portion would be slightly visible in the winter. The trackers would be tracking towards the RR tracks and that would limit any reflection issues. The variance is requested as production would be cut in half without it. The solar array would be smaller, less production and a smaller lease rate for land owner.

UMass has a satellite program in Sunderland Ma. Research is being done on small solar arrays and dual purpose/vegetable crops. Mr. Llewelyn will still own the property. The Town will be getting more taxes as the property will be removed from Chapter 61A. The Selectmen will negotiate an in lieu of taxes amount. There was a dilapidated house on the property which has been removed. The reduced set back will put the project closer to the road and a dirt road. The power company has been contacted and necessary upgrades discussed. R.C. Cubed is currently working on a same sized project on Oak Hill Road in Greenfield. After construction the panels will be serviced as needed and on a yearly basis. The posts will be 13 feet apart and Snow’s will come in to cut the grass. Any replaced panels are removed from the site. This was the site for dairy cows but that stopped 10 years ago. Area could be used for grazing in solar array with no harm to animals. The other option available to property owner is to sell land for building lots. His goal is to keep the land as agricultural.

No members of the public were in attendance.

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The public comment portion of the meeting was closed at 7:38pm.

The ZBA members discussed the information presented and that this request was for a special permit and a variance. It has a solar and agricultural element, it is a residential agricultural district. The question was raised regarding the number of solar arrays the town would want. The need for electricity keeps growing. The agricultural aspect of this project is an asset. It was noted that there will be solar production even on rainy days. The Board discussed the following findings:

Variance

- It would solve a financial hardship for the property owner
- This is the minimal size required for this project to be economically viable
- It is for the public good
- Topography site needs to be flat, other areas of property hilly or too wet. This is the only spot flat enough to support and fit panel array
- No abutters or objections
- The setback needs to be reduced to allow requested project size
- Section 10.3.2 was discussed
- Property lines would have to be redrawn if another approach was taken, more complicated
- The proposal allows land to continue to be agricultural

Special Permit Considerations

- Continue to be used for agriculture/dual use
- No blasting during installation
- Project would require up to 2 months of construction
- Upon decommissioning land will be returned to a farmable state.

It was noted that the building inspector would dictate the hours during construction, it would take up to 2 months to do the installation. The wiring would be up under panels, height of panels would discourage vandalism and the concrete pad area that includes the switch gears/transformer would be fenced in.

On a motion by Dietrich, seconded by Jaworski, (Cox/yes, Jaworski/yes, Foster/yes, Dietrich/yes, Rogers/yes) it was unanimously voted to approve a special permit for R. C. Cubed Inc., 40 Jackson Street, Worcester, MA to construct a solar facility on land owned by C. William Llewelyn Jr. 50 Upper Farms Road, Northfield, MA Assessors Map 41, A7 with the following conditions:

- **The property would continue to have agricultural/dual use**
- **Upon decommissioning the land will be returned to a farmable state**

On a motion by Jaworski, seconded by Dietrich, (Cox/yes, Jaworski/yes, Foster/yes, Dietrich/yes, Rogers/yes) it was unanimously voted to approve a variance for R. C. Cubed Inc., 40 Jackson Street, Worcester, MA to construct a solar facility closer than 100 feet (section 10.3.2E) to boundary line as set forth in application and plans on land owned by C. William Llewelyn Jr. 50 Upper Farms Road, Northfield, MA Assessors Map 41, A7.

The chair explained the 20 day appeal process. The next step is the applicant will go before the Planning Board for a site plan review.

The business meeting was set for Monday November 26th.

The minutes of September 27th, 2018 were reviewed.

On a motion by Jaworski, seconded by Dietrich it was unanimously voted to approve the minutes of September 27th, 2018 as amended.

The Board review mail as well as correspondence from the Town Governance Committee.

On a motion by Dietrich, seconded by Rogers, it was unanimously voted to close the meeting at 8:33 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Vivien Venskowski
Administrative Assistant to
The Zoning Board of Appeals