

1 PROJECT REVIEW COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

2 Wednesday, October 14, 2020

3 The meeting of the Project Review Committee was held remotely. Vice Chair B. Irwin called the meeting to
4 order at 6:04.

5
6 ATTENDANCE:

7 Commission: Garrett, Harold ☒; Speer, Neal ☐; Steen, Colleen ☒; Irwin, William ☒; Voegelé, Albin ☒;
8 Buermann, Robert ☒; LaRocque, Alisha ☐.

9
10 Staff: Bethany Remmers, Emily Klofft.

11 Guests: Morgan Kerns, Adam Cray, Michael Willard, Brian Bartels, Ian Tsao.

12
13 **Changes to Additions to the Agenda:**

14 B. Remmers requested to discuss rescheduling the November meeting under other business.

15
16 **Public Comment**

17 None.

18
19
20 **Presentation**

21 **DG Vermont Solar, LLC for 2.2 MW Ethan Allen Solar Project**

22
23 M. Kerns from NextEra Energy presented on DG Vermont Solar's site plan for a 2.2 MW solar project in St.
24 Albans. The project would be connected to Village Drive. Visual impacts would be mitigated with vegetative
25 buffers from the North, South and East.

26
27 W. Irwin asked what types of vegetation would be used. M. Willard responded that based on a preliminary
28 visibility analysis, the barriers would be a mix of evergreens and deciduous trees with understory shrubs.

29
30 M. Kerns reviewed the questions committee members had previously sent to NextEra. A survey team found
31 that from the farm access road there is 20 ft of vertical clearance and 8 ft horizontal clearance. The
32 construction vehicles would need 13 ft vertical clearance and 8 ft horizontal clearance. The applicants had
33 previously proposed using the Missisquoi Valley Rail Trail (MVRT) as a temporary access, but given that the
34 clearance under the farm access road is sufficient, they intend to use the farm access road for both
35 construction and permanent access to the site.

36
37 M. Kerns explained that the farm access road will not be fenced off for public use, and will be gated only
38 around the electrical equipment.

39
40 M. Kerns stated that NextEra can provide decommissioning bond if it is a requirement and can develop a
41 decommissioning plan. W. Irwin stated that a decommissioning plan and bond are important to ensuring
42 there is no long-term impact to the land if the project is no longer in service. B. Remmers stated that
43 requesting a decommissioning plan and bond is consistent with the committee's past decisions on similar
44 projects.

1 W. Irwin stated that the view of the area now is generally recognized as a scenic one of open space, and that it
2 would take significant screening. Including both larger trees and shrubs would be beneficial to ensuring the
3 project is appropriately screened.
4

5 R. Buermann asked if animals could graze under the solar installation. W. Irwin asked about the level of
6 mowing required, and the potential gasoline impacts of this. W. Irwin asked if pollinators could be planted at
7 the site. M. Kerns explained that NextEra's business/asset management team will contract with local
8 landscaping team to maintain vegetation between modules and vegetative screening He stated that in
9 previous projects NextEra has allowed sheep to graze under the solar panels, cows and goats are generally not
10 suitable because they can cause damage to the installation. M. Willard stated that local low grasses are
11 typically used under installations as they are compatible with the environment and only require mowing 1-2
12 times a year.
13

14 H. Garrett stated that based on his familiarity with the site, both Routes 104 and 105 are relatively far away
15 from the project site, and would not be very visible. B. Remmers asked if the applicants would be conducting a
16 visual analysis. M. Kerns stated that they could conduct one for key areas to demonstrate what the view
17 would look like with proposed landscaping. W. Irwin stated that this would be useful for the committee, and
18 that the state would most likely require it. The Committee identified northbound Interstate 89, Route 105,
19 Route 104 and the MVRT as possible areas for viewshed analysis.
20

21 H. Garrett stated that at the project site, I-89 is 35 feet up, and there is a guardrail which might screen the
22 view. A. Voegle asked what the view of the project would be from the MVRT. M. Kerns stated that there are
23 existing trees along the MVRT in that location that would screen the project.
24

25 A. Voegle asked who would be the main point of contact throughout the lifespan of the project. M. Kerns
26 stated that during the developmental stage, he is the primary point of contact. During construction a
27 construction manager will be assigned, and once completed a new project manager will be assigned for the
28 lifespan of the project.
29

30 A. Voegle asked if the property would be taxed at a higher rate since it is no longer in agricultural use. M.
31 Kerns explained that NextEra is leasing the land, so the tax burden would fall on the property owner. B.
32 Remmers stated that staff can determine if the property would be taxed differently.
33

34 A. Voegle requested that the applicant's provide references from other municipalities. A. Voegle requested
35 that NRPC staff determine the impact the project would have on the regional energy plan. W. Irwin agreed
36 that it is important that residents have a way to contact NextEra and recommended that plaques with the
37 contact information be placed at the site once constructed. M. Kerns stated that he would look into doing so.
38

39 The Committee requested that NRPC staff follow-up with NextEra Energy on the following:

- 40 • The project decommissioning plan & decommissioning bond
- 41 • Visual analysis of the project
- 42 • References from other municipalities NextEra has projects in
- 43 • Whether a sign could be permanently attached to the project fence with contact information for
44 NextEra
45

Minutes

B. Remmers stated that no action was necessary for September meeting notes unless there is a need for correction.

A. Voegelé motioned to approve the minutes of the August 2020 meeting. R. Buermann seconded. The motion carried.

Project Reviews

Act 250 – CAX, LLC: Phase II of Alexander Estates- 9 additional units

Project Details: The project is the second phase of a senior development in Georgia located off Route 7. The project is located close to, but not in the village center. The second phase would include adding 9 new single-household dwellings, extending the existing private road, and installing a four-foot concrete sidewalk throughout the development. There is Class II wetlands on site to the southwest, the project was redesigned to ensure that there is a full 50-foot buffer around these wetlands. The project will include a dry pond for stormwater. Two open space parcels will be included, a 1.6 acre parcel to the northeast and a 1.3 acre parcel to the southeast. The existing private road will be extended 700 linear feet.

W. Irwin asked if new houses will be similar to the existing structures, B. Remmers stated that they would.

R. Buermann asked if there was a map showing where the septic leach field is. The parcel map shows the septic easement running north, but does not show the location of the septic leach field

A. Voegelé asked if the units will be considered affordable, B. Remmers stated that they were not classified that way on the application, but since the structures are under a certain square footage, they are generally considered affordable.

R. Buermann asked why they had chosen to develop single-family housing, rather than duplexes or triplexes. E. Klofft stated that in the application it was written that single-household dwellings were chosen because of local zoning restrictions and because of concerns related to COVID-19.

B. Irwin asked whether there is still a bus line running on Route 7, and if so whether there could be a stop at the development. R. Buermann reported that there is no longer a bus line.

The Committee notes that septic maps were not included in the application, although the project had received a wastewater permit and it was stated in the application that there was sufficient wastewater capacity.

B. Remmers reviewed the project's conformance to the goals of the regional plan. The project meets energy goal 2, while propane is used for radiant in-floor heat and hot water, heat pumps will also be used. The project includes a 4' concrete sidewalk which meets transportation goals and is consistent with NRPC's complete streets policy for senior housing development. The project meets the natural resources goal with clustered units and 26.5% of lot as open space. The project meets wetlands & stormwater goals as it was designed to avoid impacting Class II wetlands, and will include stormwater infrastructure.

B. Remmers stated that there will be a loss of 2.19 acres of prime agricultural soils. W. Irwin asked how this loss would be mitigated. B. Remmers explained that the applicant would be required to pay a fee to the Vermont Department of Agriculture. The Committee asked how this fee would be used. B. Remmers stated that NRPC staff will research how this money is spent, and report back to the Committee.

1 B. Remmer stated that there did not appear to be any red flags with the application other than lack of a map
2 showing the septic site.

3 Members of the Committee asked how the private road would be maintained, especially with regards to
4 plowing necessary to ensure emergency vehicles can access the units. E. Klofft reported that there is a
5 homeowner's association responsible for maintenance. H. Garrett stated that there have been issues in
6 Swanton where the developer of new units refused to take responsibility for potential damage from
7 construction vehicles on a road held by a HOA. The Committee generally agreed that the developer should
8 address this issue.

9
10 *H. Garrett motioned to find that the project is conformance with the Regional Plan and does not have*
11 *substantial regional an answer to the question of who is responsible for the private road during construction*
12 *and providing impact, contingent upon the applicant providing a map of the leech field. A. Voegele seconded.*
13 *The motion carried.*

14
15 **Section 248 –BCAF GLC Solar, LLC for 500 kW group net-metered solar array**

16 Project Details: The project is a 500 kW solar array in St. Albans Town. The project is located off of Bellevue
17 Carriage Road on a brownfields site. Class II wetlands on the project site will not be impacted, but the array
18 will be built on some Class III wetlands.

19
20 W. Irwin asked if they are planning to fill the Class III wetlands on site to install the solar array.

21
22 A. Voegele asked if the applicant were planning to upgrade Bellevue Carriage Road for construction and
23 maintenance work. The road is currently in very poor condition. C. Steen states that the level of traffic
24 required for construction would likely further degrade the road.

25
26 W. Irwin asked if the property would be valuable for other uses, such as residences. C. Steen stated that the
27 site is highly contaminated with toxic coal furnaces, PCBs, and contaminated wells. The cost to remediate
28 these issues would be very high.

29
30 A. Voegele asked whether there would be any issues with sightlines. The Committee determined that there
31 would likely be no impacts because the site is on forested land.

32
33 B. Remmers asked the Committee whether or not there was any concerns about the site being a brownfield.
34 Both W. Irwin and C. Steen stated that this is a preferred site for solar since it is unlikely to be remediated.

35
36 B. Remmers showed the Committee a map of prime and base solar. The site is not in a prime solar area, but
37 does have access to three-phase power.

38
39 W. Irwin states that the Committee should ask about a decommissioning plan, whether there is a customer in
40 place for the energy, more detailed plans with fencing, and whether there will be any vegetative screening. A.
41 Voegele noted that there are several houses on the Bellevue Carriage Road.

42
43 Questions the Committee have for the applicant

- 44 • Will the Class III wetlands on site be filled in?
- 45 • Will the applicant upgrade Bellevue Carriage Road?

- Is there a decommissioning plan & bond?
- Is there an agreement to sell the energy in place or is the project speculative?
- Can the applicant provide a map of fencing on the site?
- Will there be any vegetative screening on the site?

Section 248 – DG Vermont Solar, LLC for 2.2 MW Ethan Allen Solar Project

The Committee agreed that they would like to see the additional information the applicant agreed to provide and determine what the Town of St. Albans position on the project was before providing an opinion on the project.

Updates

None.

Other Business

B. Remmers asked the Committee if they would like to reschedule next month's meeting because it falls on Veteran's Day. The Committee requested that B. Remmers ask the members not in attendance, but otherwise do not feel the meeting needs to be moved to a different day.

Adjourn

A. Voegele motioned to adjourn. R. Buermann seconded. The Committee adjourned at 8:17 PM.