

Palmer Planning Board

Planning Board Meeting Minutes

Monday, January 28, 2019

I. Call To Order

Chairman Michael Marciniac called the meeting to order at 7:02PM on Monday, January 28, 2019, in the Town Administrative Building, Planning Department Office. Present were members Norm Czech, Paul Burns-Johnson, and Kathy Burns. Tom Skowrya was absent. Also present was Town Planner, Linda Leduc, and Gillian Davis recording minutes.

II. Public Hearing

Solar Ordinance Work Session

L. Leduc stated the Town entered into a six month moratorium which went into effect on September 30, 2018, and will expire March 30, 2019.

M. Marciniac suggested the Board set a date to have the public hearing on the ordinance in order to get the advertisement out.

The Board determined to set the public hearing for February 25, 2019, at 7:30 pm.

L. Leduc distributed informational packets, which complied examples and relevant language from eight other towns' solar ordinances. She recognized the biggest difference were the definitions used to categorize projects.

L. Leduc mentioned the three largest projects in Town are currently Borrego Solar on River Street and both Borrego and Nexamp on Breckenridge. She mentioned a few of Palmer's concerns to be addressed which include but are not limited to, increase lot frontage, utility pole placement, stormwater and drainage, tree clearing, and visual impact analysis.

L. Leduc stated the definition of "large-scale" varies with each town. She continued, the Town's current definition constitutes anything greater than 250kW is considered large-scale. She expressed this definition seemed quite generic. She gave an example, Hadley limits size to less than 10 acres and Shutesbury limits to less than 15 acres.

P. Burns-Johnson asked in terms of acreage, what is the largest project the town has.

M. Marciniac answered, Nexamp project on Breckenridge is the largest, totaling 75 acres.

M. Marciniac said with rapid technology development panels are changing, increasing in efficiency and decreasing in size.

L. Leduc proposed the Board could limit acreage in order to demand the use of more efficient panels.

P. Burns-Johnson mentioned, having an acreage limit in place, currently, the Town is encouraging and allowing for the use of inefficient panels.

L. Leduc agreed stating, Palmer is also allowing for land clearing. She continued, Shutesbury is quite restrictive only allowing projects to be 3.5MW or less, which essentially forces these companies to utilize more efficient panels.

L. Leduc explained majority, if not all, towns she looked into required a special permit for large scale projects, which she highly recommended.

P. Burns-Johnson stated Palmer is a green community, it's important to look at limiting buildable acreage in order to strive for sustainability.

M. Marciniac suggested a minimum of 250ft of frontage and any work is prohibited in a 250ft from a public way and at least 250ft setback from any roadway. In addition, he suggested, Large Scale require a special permit, small scale and roof mounted require site plan approval.

There was general discussion on panels.

L. Leduc recommended that areas of land with slopes greater than 25% should not be include inot the required open space calculations.

M. Marciniac agreed and stated that would help with view shed analysis.

Final grade of access roads should be no greater than 8%.
Panels should be installed on slopes no greater than 15%.

N. Czech asked about solar projects on earth removal sites.

M. Marciniac said cuts and fills must be balanced.

P. Burns-Johnson indicated he liked the language from the Town of Beverly, stating "if a property owner or designated representative, of a lot from which the proposed installation can be seen without obstruction requests a visual rendering of the proposed installation from a vantage point of their choosing on said lot, the applicant shall submit one as part of the site plan review."

M. Marciniac agreed stating he would like to add more information regarding visual analysis. He added one of his main issues to address is protecting the abutters.

L. Leduc explained that absent member, Tom Skowyra has expressed concern regarding tree removal.

M. Marciniac stated at what point we want to lose our pasture land.

P. Burns-Johnson mentioned open pasture land is much more visible.

There was discussion on sizing and definitions.

The Board agreed to the following project sizes and permits:

<250 MW building permit only

Roof mounted of any size is Site Plan Approval only.

Everything over than 250 MW requires special permit.

P. Burns-Johnson questioned a maximum acreage of 25 acres.

N. Czech suggested whatever is being clear cut, there be a 1:5x in addition to what we already require.

M. Marciniec suggested requiring a landscape maintenance plan and to look into construction bonds.

N. Czech, added maintain the area outside the fence.

P. Burns-Johnson stated language regarding buffer needs to be stronger.

M. Marciniec agreed stating 95% opaque year round. He added these projects should be considered as commercial bordering a residential use.

III. New Business

E360 Discussion

L. Leduc explained the Town is entering a subscription to E360 which is a research service that allows for easy access to related information. She compiled a list of minor errors to be updated on the system.

Altitude Organics Minor Amendment Request Letter

M. Marciniec read a letter from Attorney Jerry plumb, which asks for a minor amendment to the site, 8 Chamber Road, owned by Altitude Organics. The request letter states: The Planning Board granted Special Permits on 8 Chamber Road, including medical marijuana cultivation, processing, deliveries, and sales. In addition, Altitude Organics was granted a Special Permit for the sale of medical and non-medical marijuana at Thorndike Street location. At this time, Altitude Organics requests a minor amendment to its Special Permits with respect to Chamber Road to include non-medical cultivation, processing and retail sales. He read, this is a minor amendment because the site is approved for medical cultivation, processing, sales and deliveries. The same standards apply for the approval of non-medical uses. The Massachusetts Cannabis Control Commission permits dual licensed facilities where medical and non-medical cannabis is cultivated, processed and sold on the same site.

A motion to approve the minor amendment to the location on Chamber Road, was made by N. Czech, seconded by P. Burns-Johnson. The motion passed (4:0).

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A motion to approve the meeting minute as written was made by N. Czech, seconded by P. Burns-Johnson. The motion passed (4:0).

Mass Trails Grant Letter of Support

L. Leduc explained, a letter of support has been requested to aid the Town's application to the FY2019 MA Recreational Trails Grant Program to promote the development and expansion of the MA Central Rail Trail.

A motion to grant a letter of support to the Town's grant application was made by N. Czech, seconded by P. Burns-Johnson. The motion passed (4:0).

IV. Old Business

Knox Pond Construction Report #135

A motion to acknowledge receipt for Knox Pond Construction Report #135 was made by K. Burns, seconded by N. Czech. The motion passed (4:0).

Town Planner Update:

Quaker Lane Letter

L. Leduc constructed a letter being sent, regarding Quaker Lane and Breton Estates. At the previous meetings, there has been discussion regarding the safety of the site and the extension request.

A motion to approve the letter was made by P. Burns-Johnson, seconded by N. Czech. The motion passed (4:0).

Abutting Town Notices and Monthly Interest Allocation Report were distributed.

V. Adjournment

A motion to adjourn at 8:53 pm was made by P. Burns-Johnson, seconded by N. Czech. The motion passed (4:0).



Kathleen Burns, Clerk