



Planning Board – Town of Spencer  
*Minutes*  
Planning Board Meeting  
Tuesday February 18, 2014 at 7:00 PM  
McCourt Social Hall  
Memorial Town Hall

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**Planning Board Members Present:** Chair James Whalen, Shirley Shiver, Mary Stolarczyk, Robert Ceppi

**Planning Board Members Absent:** Jonathan Viner

**Staff Present:** Brynn Johnson ODIS Clerk

**Staff Absent:** Michelle Buck, Town Planner

Mr. Whalen opens the meeting at 7:00pm.

1. **7:00pm Public Hearing – Major Site Plan Review**, Applicant: SJA Solar LLC. Owner: Cistercian Abbey of Spencer, Inc. Location: 167 North Spencer Road, Spencer Assessor's Map R59-2; R48-5; R49-1; R52-6; R59-1 and R53-2. Project: Construct a solar facility capable of generating roughly 17.5 megawatts of solar power on Abbey land. The approximately 120 acre ground level solar facility is located within the Rural Residential Zoning District.

Steven Plonsker, Solterra Project Developer provided the background history of this project. In 2011 the Abbey looked at their financial needs and decided they need to do something to supplement their income so they approached Solterra to see if a solar farm would be possible. They discovered they would need National Grid to build an express feeder to connect this solar farm to the closest sub-station which is the Treasure Valley Sub-station. National Grid issued their approval and final impact study in April of 2013. They ran into difficulties with the state solar programs. They missed the deadline for last year's state programs for renewable energy credits and net-metering. They would like to take part in the next wave of state programs which will start in March or April. To get into one of these programs they will need Town approvals and major permits in place.

It was expensive to get the interconnect with National Grid therefore in order for the solar farm to be profitable it has to be this large they cannot reduce the size. Father Robert helped plan where the panels would go so they are removed from the daily activities of the Monks.

Mr. Plonsker says this project is not only good for the environment but its also good for the Town. They have estimated the Town will benefit by about \$150,000 or more a year through a combination of taxes and net-metering benefits.

Project Engineer Donald Graves goes over the plans. The development is broken up into 11 farms, starting to the south near Rt. 31 and Alta Crest Road and going north along both sides of Alta Crest

Road all the way up close to the Abbey's main buildings. Each of the 11 farms will be enclosed by a fence. They made sure to stay out of the 100 ft wetland buffer zone. They do not have to file with the Conservation Commission but they have received comments from them. They will be addressing all of Conservation Commission. Also they received comments from the Town's third-party reviewer Lenard Engineering. They are working on addressing all of those issues. At the ZBA meeting last week the Board continued the hearing and scheduled a site walk.

Father Robert, Abbey Forest Manager and Fire manager, says he helped the developer pick sites for the panels that are mostly out of sight from the daily activities of the monastery. The Monks voted to support this solar project. Being able to use the sun to make energy is a very attractive concept to them.

Steven Tyler, Superintendent of Spencer Utilities and Facilities, asks what the total area of disturbance will be. Mr. Graves says it's about 70 acres of panels with additional 70 acres of disturbance for access to the panels. Total overall disturbance is about 140 acres. Mr. Tyler asks out of the overall disturbed area how much will involve the clear cutting of trees. Mr. Graves says 71 acres of woods will be cleared.

Mr. Tyler asks how the state solar credits work. Mr. Plonsker explains this is administered by the Department of Energy Resources it's strictly a financial program. For every megawatt they produce they will receive a credit. You have to be accepted into this program.

Mr. Tyler asks if this is the largest or one of the largest solar developments in the State. Mr. Plonsker says he doesn't know for sure because this farm is broken up into 11 smaller farms, but the overall output will be one of the largest in the State. Mr. Graves says he does know of a development under construction in Warren that is 18 MW. The Abbey solar project is 17.5MW.

Mr. Tyler asks if they need state and Federal permits. Mr. Plonsker says no. Mr. Tyler disagrees he says they will need a MEPA (Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act) review. Mr. Plonsker will look into this and get a determination.

Mr. Tyler wants to make sure there is no flooding on North Spencer Road (Rt. 31) and the area to the west toward Brooks Pond. Rt. 31 had to be closed three times in the past three years due to flooding. He feels past flooding in these areas has been caused by Abbey forestry. His biggest concern is during construction when all the soil is disturbed all the water is going run toward Rt. 31.

Steven Tyler states the Town wants a construction supervisor/monitor to be available at all times. The Town wants the Developer to put money in a fund to pay for a construction monitor. This monitor would be selected, managed by and report to the Town of Spencer. The Wilson Street solar farm took up too much time and town resources he does not want to see this happen again.

Ginny Scarlet notes Graves Engineering made a great effort to stay out of the wetlands. However, there is a lot of land disturbance therefore she says impact on wetlands is inevitable. They will need a stormwater management system pre, post and during construction. She wants the construction inspector/monitor the Town hires to be familiar with stormwater and drainage issues.

Mr. Shiver asks will there be a new curb cut onto North Spencer Road (Rt. 31). Mr. Graves says no. She asks what the life of the solar farm is. Mr. Plonsker says about 30+ years. She would like to know about the decommission plan is. Mr. Plonsker says they have a decommission plan with the Abbey. Ms. Shiver would like to see it.

Mr. Tyler says he would like to be involved before any clear-cutting. He wants to see this done in phases not clear cutting 100 acres all at once.

Ms. Shiver notes if they need a MEPA or any other state or federal permits that will set them way back on their dates.

Mr. Whalen supports a surety bond. There is a discussion of how much tax revenue this project will generate for the Town. The revenue generated will go toward services not mitigation.

Ms. Scarlet questions one of the roads on the plan; it crosses over APR land to the west. They may have to ask the State if they can drive construction vehicles over that APR land. Mr. Plonsker says he will look into it.

**MOTION:** Mr. Ceppi makes a motion to extend the time to act to September 16, 2014. Ms. Shiver seconds.

**VOTE:** 4-0 in favor The Board asks Mr. Plonsker to sign the time to act extension form.

**MOTION:** Mr. Ceppi makes a motion to continue this hearing to the next scheduled meeting on March 18, 2014. Ms. Shiver seconds the motion.

**VOTE:** 4-0 in favor

## **2. General Board Discussion- Potential Zoning Bylaw Amendments:**

**A. Drive-way Bylaw-** Steve Tyler gives his input. He wants to make what “paved” means clear. He wants the apron 4 inches thick. More detailed stormwater. Would like driveways to have a snow storage area. Mr. Tyler will send Ms. Buck a memo about this.

**B. Inclusionary housing-** The Board tables this discussion until the next meeting

**C. DLTA Grant:** The Board discussed tabling this until the next meeting. However Mr. Whalen feels if they wait they will miss the deadline. Mr. Whalen would like this Board to plan ahead for housing development in Spencer. He recommends someone make a motion to apply for grant funding for housing development.

**MOTION:** Ms. Shiver makes a motion to submit an application for the funding to plan ahead for housing, economic development and preservation. Ms. Stolarczyk seconds the motion.

**VOTE:** 4-0 in favor

## **Approval of Minutes – December 23, 2013**

Motion: Ms. Shiver makes a motion to approve the minutes from 12-23-2013 Ms. Stolarczyk seconds the motion. Vote: 4-0 in favor

**3. Adjournment:** With no further discussion the meeting is adjourned at 8:50PM.

**Submitted by:** Brynn Johnson ODIS Jr Clerk

**Approved by the Planning Board on:** \_\_\_\_4/15/2014\_\_\_\_\_

### **List of Documents used on February 18, 2014**

#### Items sent to Planning Board prior to Meeting:

- Agenda
- Memo from Michelle Buck to Planning Board Dated 02/12/14
- Site Plan Review application and Plans from Abbey Solar project
- Abbey Solar project narrative dated 2/6/14
- Abbey Solar Site Plan peer review response letter from Graves dated 2/13/14
- Comments from Margaret dated 2/6/14
- Comments from Steve Tyler dated 2/5/14
- CMRPC Memo and Application info dated 12/16/2013
- Minutes 12/23/2013

#### Items submitted at the Meeting:

- none