

Planning Board – Town of Spencer

Minutes

Regular Planning Board Meeting
Monday, March 20, 2012 at 7:00 PM
McCourt Social Hall
Memorial Town Hall



The meeting was called to order at 7:00PM.

Planning Board Members Present: Chair Shirley Shiver, Robert Ceppi, Mary Stolarczyk, Ralph DiChiara, James Whalen and Associate Member Jonathan Viner.

Planning Board Members Absent: None

Staff present: Michelle Buck, Town Planner and Brynn Johnson, Jr. Clerk

1. New Business:

A. Discussion, Common Ground Land Trust (Ginny Scarlett)

Ms. Scarlett explains the purpose of her discussion is to inform the Board of how the land trust can benefit Spencer. Ms. Scarlett wants to bring awareness of the Land Trust to the town. Common Ground Land Trust is focused on conservation as well as creating recreational open spaces. They are currently working with the Audubon Society and the Greater Worcester County Land Trust on The Sibley Farm project; they have applied for tax exempt status 501-C3. The Trust currently has 40 members.

B. ANR Application for Route 49, R21/38 (Seven Mile River Associates)

Ms. Buck had asked that the applicant make two corrections to this plan prior to tonight's meeting. They did not get back to her and have not made these corrections yet.

(1.) Add a note stating the purpose of the plan to divide the parcel into B1 and B2.

(2.) Clarify the easement and confusing line style on the plan.

Ms. Shiver asked are there any other decisions in the past that a planning board in either Spencer or East Brookfield has made on this plan. Ms. Buck referenced the 2004 ANR in plan book 808 Page 60 that was approved by the board in 2004. This reference helped clarify this plan for Ms. Shiver and the Board. The Board would also like the applicant to make changes to the plan note number 4, and add a note that this lot has no direct access. Ms. Buck will ask the applicant to make these corrections before a decision is made. There was no representative of Seven Mile River Associates present at tonight's meeting. Action will be postponed until the next meeting

C. ANR Application, Hastings Road, R38/1 (Thomas R. Fancy)

The purpose is to subdivide his lot into (lots 1 and 2), with the intention of building on lot 2 in the future. Ms. Shiver asked the board if they have any questions for Mr. Fancy. There were no issues with this plan. The Plan met all requirements. Plan was approved at this times, Ms. Buck signed Plan.

MOTION: Ms. Shiver made a motion to approve this plan. The motion was seconded by Mr. Ceppi

VOTE: 5-0 in favor

D. Proposed Solar Farm on North Brookfield Road (CTC Electric)

Conceptual discussion with Planning Board for proposed Solar Farm on North Brookfield Road presented by Serge Weiss, Chief Operating Officer, John Henry, Sr. Project Manager, Kevin Orchard, Project Manager and Scott Fisher, Partner and Founder. CTC Electric has already submitted a special permit application to the ZBA. (Public Hearing to be held on 4/10/2012)

Mr. Fisher started the discussion with a brief layout of the proposed site; the site is a 35 acre parcel of land on the south side of North Brookfield Road. They have checked with conservation and there are no wetlands on the site. Mr. Fisher then asked if there are any questions.

Mr. Ceppi asked if this is the same company that had been approved to build a solar farm on Rt. 31. Mr. Fisher said no they are a different company. Mr. Ceppi asked what is going on with the other solar farm project. Ms. Buck answered, they are having problems with National Grid and the interconnection agreement along with other civil issues between the partners. Mr. Weiss added that this project is working with National Grid now to make sure they have the proper interconnect.

Ms. Shiver asked are they leasing the land or will they be buying it. Mr. Henry said they have an agreement with the land owner to purchase the land.

Mr. Viner asked what the output would be. Mr. Weiss answered its output will be between 1-2 megawatts, which translates to electricity for around 200 to 400 homes depending on consumption.

Mr. Whalen asked if this project will be privately funded. Mr. Fisher answered yes.

Ms. Buck asked the Board if they have any input or concerns they would like to bring up now before the applicant goes in front of the ZBA for a special permit. At this time Mr. Henry asked the Board if they would like an overview of their plan. Mr. Henry explained that they are looking to install the farm centrally on the land; the foot print of the installation area will be approximately 10.2 acres. That will be surrounded by an eight foot high chain link fence. The area inside the fence will be approximately 13 acres. The closest setback is approximately 53 feet. The setback from North Brookfield Road would be approximately 200 feet. They are keeping decent setbacks from all the abutters. The proposed tree clearing line that runs along the property line to the South would leave a 50 foot buffer and to the West 10-15 foot tree clearing limit. Basically the only abutters are to the South. The proposed access would be on North Brookfield Road; via a 10-16 foot wide gravel access road to the site; the first 15 feet would be paved. They would need to obtain a curb cut permit from the town. They are not sure yet what the final grading would be they will have to do a geotechnical study and stormwater plan.

Ms. Buck asked how many acres of trees would be cleared. Mr. Henry didn't know the exact amount but estimates between 10-15 acres would need to be cleared.

Mr. Viner inquired about noise around the transformers. Mr. Weiss says the transformers have about a 7 decibel hum the same as an idling car; they plan to put the transformers on the side of the site that is away from abutters. Therefore no one should be bothered by it.

Mr. DiChiara asked will there be any building or structures on this property that would be visible from the road. Mr. Weiss says there would only be utility poles and maybe a cabinet for meters.

Ms. Shiver inquired about landscaping. Mr. Weiss explains they don't anticipate the need to do much landscaping because the site is so buffered by trees.

Board Member Robert Ceppi states that he has to recuse himself from this project; he and John Henry worked together in the past.

Mr. Viner asked how this project will benefit the town. Mr. Weiss says the tax revenue would benefit the town.

Mr. DiChiara asked are there any other farms in this area. Mr. Weiss showed pictures of their solar farm in Orange MA. Ms. Buck pointed out to the Board if they wanted to see an actual solar farm there is one in Charlton.

Ms. Shiver asked what is the maintenance involved. Mr. Weiss explains they have an Operations of Maintenance plan standard for every solar farm. The grass gets cut once or twice a year so it doesn't get above 3 feet high; they do regular maintenance on the inverters and re-closers (which are safety features); and the panels are washed once a year with just water.

Mr. Whalen brought up the question, what is open space? He asked the applicants if they have any opinion on open space. Mr. Weiss responded he has no opinion on what open space is; but says a solar farm has a light eco footprint.

Mr. DiChiara asked what the life expectancy of the solar panels is. Mr. Weiss explains they last around 25 years, after which they would need to be replaced.

Mr. Ceppi asked how the old panels are disposed of. Mr. Weiss explains that the type of panels they use would be ground up and disposed of ; they are non toxic.

Mr. DiChiara asked what a solar farm does to property values. Mr. Weiss explains according to their research property value is not affected and this site is well buffered by trees. Not much will be seen from the road.

Ms. Shiver asked the Board if they have any other questions. There are none at this time. She explained to the applicant their next step would be to follow the site plan submission standards and work with Ms. Buck.

The Board Thanked CTC Electric for their presentation.

2. Approval of Minutes (from March 5th 2012)

MOTION: Mr. DiChiara made a motion to accept the minutes from March 5th 2012. Ms. Shiver seconded the motion.

VOTE: 5-0 in favor

3. Town Planner Report

- A. Ms. Buck explains they should be getting at site plan review application soon from New England Automotive. The issue with it right now is they may have paved the lower lot in violation of the Conservation Commission's order
- B. The Richland Ave cul-de-sac approvals have expired but the builder may want to resuscitate the project.
- C. Ms. Buck asked the Board about notices of zoning changes and special permits from abutting towns that are mailed to her, would the Board like to see these notices? The Board discussed this and came to the conclusion we will keep a folder of the notices and bring them to the Planning Board meetings for the Board to review.
- D. Ms. Buck explains she is still working on the Town's open space plan she is hoping to be done within the next few weeks. When she is done the Planning Board will receive a draft, before it is sent to the state so they can provide a comment letter.
- E. Ms. Buck informed the Board she will not be able to attend the April 17th meeting. It is scheduled during April vacation week. She asked if the Board wanted to reschedule the meeting to a time she could be there. The Board discussed and decided to keep the meeting as scheduled on April 17th (there are no public hearings scheduled for this date).

Ms. Shiver added one last note to benefit the Board. She explains that if you recuse yourself, you should leave the room. The Board discussed this, and came to the conclusion that you can excuse yourself from the room or sit in as part of the public.

4. Adjournment

MOTION: Mr. Ceppi made a motion to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Ms. Stolarczyk.

VOTE: 5-0 in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 8:50PM.

Submitted by: Brynn Johnson, Jr. Clerk

Approved by the Planning Board on: _____

List of Documents used on March 20, 2012

- Agenda
- Minutes of 3/5/2012
- Memo from Town Planner Michelle Buck to Planning Board dated March 15, 2012
- ANR Plan, Route 49, R21/38 (Seven Mile River Associates)
- ANR Plan, Hastings Road, R38/1 (Thomas R. Fancy)
- Conceptual Plan, Solar Farm North Brookfield Road (CTC Electric)