

Barre City Planning Commission

November 10, 2022 Meeting Minutes

Present: Michael Hellein (Chair), Amanda Gustin (Vice Chair), Joe Reil (Secretary), Rosemary Averill, David Sichel, Becky Wigg

Absent: None

Staff: Janet Shatney (Director of Planning, Permitting & Assessing)

Visitors: Linda Macris; Ralph Meima and Jake Clark, representatives from Encore Renewable Energy / I Love Cows Solar LLC

1. Call to Order.

5:34pm.

2. Adjustments to the Agenda.

None.

3. Approval of Minutes.

- i. October 27, 2022 view draft minutes

Sichel moves to approve, Reil seconds, unanimous in favor.

4. Public comment (for something not on the agenda)

None.

5. New Business

- i. Presentation from I Love Cows Solar LLC at 0 Allen Street regarding their application for a certificate of Public Good.

Hellein notes that we do not have decision-making authority on this application, this is just informational, Shatney adds that we do have the authority to make recommendations based on our zoning regulations.

They recently sent a 45-day notice of intent to file for a Certificate of Public Good with the Public Utility Commission for a 2.2 Megawatt solar array located just west of Allen Street. Hoping to file for CPG early next year, how long before approval can vary. Wants to get questions/concerns from us so they can be taken into account in the CPG application.

The array would occupy around 12.5 acres in a parcel that is about 25 acres. Most of the parcel is not usable for the array, due to wetlands, slopes, transmission lines, etc.

They would like our feedback and questions so that they can be taken into account in their application.

There was discussions and questions around several topics:

Primary Agriculture land/Agricultural uses of the land: Most of the land is classified as Statewide Interest/Primary Agriculture Soil, though not all. That is not recognized as a reason to not place a solar array, though the land cannot be used for traditional Agriculture while the array is present there is no long-term disruption of the soil as a result of the array's presence and some planting to support pollinator populations (birds, insects and bats) in the area is expected, and it's also possible to do dual-use Agriculture to do things like graze Sheep, grow berries, other things in between and under the panels that have a productive Agricultural use. Sheep are likely to be used, as they can also control vegetation that can be problematic to the arrays.

The Expected Lifespan of the array is 25-35 years and a decommissioning plan is a required part of the application. There both State and City Solar Taxes to provide some benefit at those levels, this array would also be applicable towards Barre's renewable energy targets. The sites tend to be low maintenance, though they are constantly monitored remotely so that any problems (weather, damage from animals, etc.) can be repaired.

There will be a fence around the array, a 7-foot Agricultural fence, tends to be blend into the landscape very well, and allows small animals to travel through unimpeded. A study about the best type of screening vegetation in order to improve the appearance is also being worked on to be included in the application. The size of this array is common, though there are both larger and smaller arrays present in the State.

For comparison, the Vermont Energy Atlas (<https://www.vtenergydashboard.org/energy-atlas>) includes information on existing arrays, for comparison. Green Mountain Power has a Solar Map on their site (<https://gmp.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=4eaec2b58c4c4820b24c408a95ee8956>) which also includes similar information.

- ii. Approval of Council's Municipal Planning Grant Resolution for application.

This is an approval-in-advance, as this has not gone to Council yet. Shatney notes that this is on our existing Capital Improvement Plan. The maximum amount of the grant is \$27,500 and the City will need to match 10%. This is already incorporated into the budget.

Motion to authorize Hellein (as Chair) to sign the resolution to bring this to Council. Gustin moves to approve, Averill seconds, unanimous in favor.

- iii. Review of draft Municipal Planning Grant application.

What's present in the current Draft is minimal. The intent is to look for someone to help update the Summer Street Plan so that it is implementable. There was some discussion around cost of the project, Shatney indicates the grant will likely not cover the entire cost, but she is included the expected costs in the budget, so they are accounted for.

Shatney reports that she has enough information to begin putting the application together and will be sending out drafts for Commissioners to review prior to the December 1 deadline.

- 6. Confirm Date of Next Meeting.

- i. December 8, 2022

- 7. Staff Updates.

- i. Tuesday (11/15/2022) night, City Council will meet at Alumni Hall. This meeting will focus on discussions around ARPA, there is a survey available online for citizens to weigh in: <https://www.barrecity.org/arpa-survey.html>

Prior to the main meeting, there will be the revealing of the Barre City Victory sign at 5:30 (a piece of Barre City's History that has special significance to Veterans).

- ii. Discussion about applications for the Permit Administrator, one candidate has already applied, another plans to submit an application soon. There are no candidates for the Junior Planner or Assessor positions yet.

- 8. Round Table.

Gustin mentions the ARPA survey (link above).

- 9. Adjourn

6:34 pm, **Gustin moves, Averill seconds, unanimous in favor.**