



Town of Knox Planning Board

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Minutes: May 9th, 2024

Present: Chairman Garry Bunzey, Todd LaGrange, Pat Catchpole, Deb Nelson, Betty Ketcham, Zachery Martineau, alternate member Deirdre Keating.

Also attending: Travis Rosencrans, Josh Koppel, Alec R. Gladd, Gregory Gibbons, Dan Berwick, Sam Jasinski, Darcy Knapp, John Knapp, Carrie Novak, Pam Kleppel, Gary Kleppel and Town Board Liaison June Springer.

The meeting began at 7:30 PM. Chairman Garry Bunzey started roll call and established the presence of a quorum.

Deb Nelson made a motion to accept the April meeting minutes, Betty seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

****The Reservoir Road “New Leaf Energy” solar public hearing began.***

Travis Rosencrans stood and gave a review with details concerning the solar project. He stated they are proposing a gravel road to provide access to the array. Travis stated these arrays do require tree clearing. The 5 MW project will occupy 27 acres, of which 19.5 acres of trees will be cut, plus 4 or 5 more acres of “tree topping” (cutting tops of trees to limit shading). There will be a buffer area of at least 175 feet that will not be cut.

Documentation including the IPaC (Information for Planning and Consultation) for endangered species and cultural assessment has been given to the planning board for review. The area is no longer a public water supply for Altamont. Travis stated there is still no update from army corps of engineers, and he doesn't think they are checking project areas unless a building permit has been applied.

****New Leaf opened for questions from the public.***

Gary Kleppel asked, “Where do the culverts empty?” He also asked about changes the project would make to drainage discharge toward Township Road. Travis explained that there will be two culverts which will discharge to an existing wetland, and storm swales,

stormwater basins, perennial plantings and vegetation between the rows of panels should improve the drainage issues they now experience.

John Knapp, who owns neighboring and adjacent properties to Reservoir Road had concerns about the new pole placements. He was told that National Grid decides where the new poles would be placed. National Grid also refuses to put anything in writing. Travis explained that power poles on Reservoir Road would be upgraded to carry three phase lines, and there would be six poles about 30 feet apart in the “pole farm” to connect to the transmission lines. Transformers can’t be placed underground, so they are placed on poles. They would be on New Leaf Energy property, about 700 feet from Berne Altamont Road where they would not be visible from Berne-Altamont Road. Travis said screening vegetation would be planted.

Carrie Novak brought up concerns about houses within close proximity of the solar project being subjected to possible health concerns. New Leaf stated that the project area is far away from residential properties and that the solar farm does not emit anything harmful. The panels are made of silicon and glass.

New Leaf stated they would like avoid widening Reservoir Road and keep it at 14 feet wide. It would require less tree clearing, less road construction and maintenance overhead, and would result in less storm water runoff. The typical turnaround radius would remain. Planning board members agreed to consult with the fire department and code enforcement officers in support of that position and to request a waiver if necessary.

There will be a flowering conservation seed mix that will go internal to the array. Planning board members stated they want native species, and they look for pollinator opportunities. They do not want anything invasive that will potentially harm neighboring fields.

New Leaf stated there will be 12,000 400-watt panels, enough to meet electricity demand of 3,000 houses. Carrie Novak had concerns about the sound pollution in the area. Concrete pad mount equipment is the culprit for the sound pollution when dealing with solar farms, but New Leaf is not using the pad mount equipment. Small inverters 400 feet from the closest neighbor will generate very small amounts of sound, similar to the hum of a refrigerator.

A planning board member asked if there will be any medical interference with pace-makers. New Leaf responded by saying solar energy is direct current. There will be absolutely no medical interference as it doesn’t produce EMF (electro-magnetic field), as alternating current does.

Gary Kleppel, who is the chair of the Knox Agricultural Advisory Committee, stood in front of the planning board and made a statement about Agrivoltaics, Agricultural Soils, and Geomorphology and Hydrology. He said the Ag Committee recommends the new solar law

be written to require incorporation of agrivoltaics, and that a soil survey and a geological/hydrological study be conducted prior to approval of new solar projects, and that monitoring wells be required to help identify and mitigate affected water supplies.

The planning board asked for a sample business model to explain how agrivoltaics would work: who would be responsible for what tasks. Gary recommended checking United Agrivoltaics.

John Knapp presented an article from the Times Union in front of the Planning Board asking them to read, and take into consideration, the implications this will have on the community and surrounding areas.

Public hearing was closed at 8:35 p.m.

There was a discussion about solar farms in Massachusetts and how some places have sheep taking care of the grass cutting. Planning Board members agreed that it's a great idea. Gary noted that the wet soils at the Reservoir Road site are not conducive to grazing all breeds of sheep, but Angola-Romney Marsh sheep would be more suitable.

A Planning Board member brought up how the Army Corps of Engineers has not given them their decision of what's "wetland" and what's not. Travis Rosencrans stated they do not do a jurisdictional determination unless there is an official permit application submitted to the corps.

The Planning Board has the soil survey but is still waiting on agencies to make decisions. They are going to hear from the Albany County Planning Board for their advice and recommendations. They will soon be in a position to either deny the application or approve it conditionally. Approving it conditionally will be based on the wetlands findings, the road, etc.

Chairman Garry Bunzey stated there are copies of the information presented at this meeting plus some additional information available from the town clerk. Information is also available on the Knox town website. New Leaf Energy will leave the box link active.

Deirdre emailed everybody a link to the Times Union article John Knapp presented in front of the Planning Board.

Deb made a motion to adjourn, Zach seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 8:57 PM.

The next meeting will be held on Thursday June 13th, 2024.

Respectfully submitted by Emily Griffith, Planning Board Secretary