



Woodstock, Vermont *The Shire Town of Windsor County*
TOWN - VILLAGE MANAGER GOVERNMENT

Town Hall • P.O. Box 488 • Woodstock, Vermont 05091 • 802/457-3456

PLANNING COMMISSION
Draft Minutes
January 2, 2019

MEMBERS PRESENT: Sally Miller, Susan Boston, Sara Stadler, Ben Jervey, Sam Segal, Eric Goldberg
MEMBERS ABSENT: Michael Pacht
OTHERS PRESENT: Kevin Geiger, Pete Fellows, Michael Brands

I. OPENING

Chair Miller opened the meeting at 7:30 pm.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The PC approved the December 5, 2018 minutes as submitted.

III. OTHER BUSINESS

IV. NEW BUSINESS

A. Solar Presentation

TRORC Planners Kevin Geiger and Pete Fellows presented a discussion on meeting the State's alternative energy mandates via solar energy development within Woodstock.

Mr. Geiger distributed a 6 page handout entitled Municipal Template - Energy Data which contained information specific to Woodstock. The spreadsheet contains data that estimates current energy use and provides targets for future energy use. The data is mainly based on LEAP (Long-range Energy Alternatives Planning) information.

Solar energy is considered the best bet for Woodstock's alternative energy future. Wind is not sufficiently strong or constant, and hydro is near impossible to permit due to macro water issues. Wood, although commonly used, is not considered an energy of the future due to projected models showing a substantial decrease in use.

The 2050 State target is for Woodstock to produce 17,000 to 21,000 MW of renewable energy. The 2015 total is listed as 0.88 MW with 0.35 WM produced from solar. Obviously the 2050 target will be a large leap in production.

Chair Miller asked if more updated data was available. It appears there has been a visible increase in recent years with additional solar PV installation.

Mr. Geiger felt this is a fairly simple request and will ask for an update from PSB. He also noted roof top solar production is far too small of a factor in the overall need. Large scale production is a must.



Mr. Fellows noted the solar farm currently under construction in Hartland at the corner of Route 12 and Route 4 is a 500 kW site requiring 3 acres of space. A 20 MW site, to meet the 2050 mandate, would require from 80 - 200 acres of PV panels.

The region will need 50 MW of solar by 2020 to meet state goals.

Heat pumps are another target whereby electricity is used in a more efficient manner to create both heat and cold. Section 1H of the Template forecasts a target of 147 units by 2025, 393 units by 2035 and 815 units by 2050.

The rewrite of the Town Plan's Energy Chapter was just completed in December. A public hearing is on hold to enable a State mandated rewrite of the Facilities chapter and to add language regarding forests and wildlife corridor protections, also mandated by the State. The mandated rewrites allow the PC to step back and review their stance on preferred sites.

A review of the reproduced (now based on LIDAR technology) Scenic Viewshed and Solar Potential map shows a number of white areas. These are essentially not viewable from public streets and roads and could potentially accept solar development. The PC discussed adding a process whereby a developer could receive preferred status for developing in the lesser viewed areas. Mr. Segal stated he would draft a statement to this effect.

The discussion morphed into the forest and wildlife connector requirements of Town Plan adoption.

A review of the forestry/corridor map showed that not all "white" areas should be considered preferred sites for solar development. The southwest corner of Woodstock, is heavily forested. A large portion of this was zoned 28 acre Forest Reserve to limit subdivision and additional development. Most of the property is in current use. A major limiting factor is that there are no 3 phase power lines in this area of town. Solar farms need a 3 phase power line to transport the electricity. Although large swaths of this area are not visible from a public road, development would be detrimental to wildlife and forest activities.

The strong forest coverage of the southwest corner connects with similar areas in Reading, Plymouth and Bridgewater. The forestry map showed these areas. Connector areas allow for migration and interconnectivity with other areas of the State, the Northeast and into Canada. With global warming becoming a reality, wildlife will need access to more accommodating environments in order to survive.

The updated Town Plan would include a forest/corridor map similar to the one being reviewed and text noting the Town's efforts to control development in the forested areas and how wildlife corridors would operate. The Natural Elements chapter has a good base to start with. The Town Planner will draft language.

In a discussion of placement of solar farms, the 300' buffer rule was mentioned. The 300' buffer is deemed by wildlife experts to be the amount of safe space from development that wildlife need to survive. Clear cutting a large area, potentially multiple acres, of forest would remove the necessary buffer thereby forcing wildlife further afield. Another term is called the "inner" forest where wildlife has a safe haven to live.

The TRORC planners then discussed the capital improvement mandate. The Town is required to list facilities that may have capital improvements, large expenses. The list is fairly inclusive including facilities for public use such as schools, hospitals, recreational uses etc. Transportation items such as sidewalks and road maintenance are not included.

The Town Planner will draft a list of facilities as a start. For example it is known that the Emergency Services Building is currently being considered for a major renovation. An excel sheet listing projects with an approximate price tag is envisioned. What is needed, how much and how to pay for it would be included. The Select Board is reviewing a capital budget program for the upcoming budget cycle, this could be a good start as well.

The TRORC Planners suggested using an approximation, versus getting into a hard and fast study. A Town Plan is approved for an eight year cycle, placing hard and fast numbers may not prove valid in the future. A general estimation would be a better method.

It was mentioned that the middle and high school buildings are in need of a major renovation. The schools should be contacted to verify the need.

If the Town Plan is to be valid for eight years, maybe other chapters should be updated. It was noted that the Education chapter as currently written has dated information. The Health chapter as well needs an upgrade. Should parking issues be addressed in the new rewrite?

It was noted a total rewrite will take a lot of time to research and to write the various improvements. The current focus is on the Energy chapter to have a say in the State review process.

Back to the solar preferred status, should the Town offer incentives to solar development? If the State mandate is to be met, incentives should be offered. Incentives do not necessarily have to be monetary, they could also be improvements to a town road for example.

V. OLD BUSINESS

A. Energy Chapter Rewrite

Discussed above.

B. Village Zoning Rewrite

Due to a shortage of time there was no further discussion of the Village Zoning Regulations rewrite.

VII. NEXT MEETING

The next regularly scheduled meeting is February 6, 2019.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael Brands, AICP
Town/Village Planner

