



**PLANNING BOARD MINUTES
TOWN OF FOSTER
Benjamin Eddy Building
6 South Killingly Road, Foster, RI
Wednesday: September 21, 2016
7:00 p.m.**

A. Call to Order

Mr. Carey called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m.

B. Roll Call

Board Members Present: Joseph Carey (Chair); Julia Parmentier (Vice-Chair); Helen Hardy (Secretary); Thomas Mercier; Michael Carpenter; Sergio Spaziano; and Richard Sparks.

Staff Present: Juliana King (Planner).

Public and Applicants Present: Walter “Bob” and Cynthia Steere; Alan Clapp and Julie Beauchemin (Nexamp/Foster Renewables, LLC); and Kevin DeMers (DiPrete Engineering).

D. Correspondence

Discussion/Action

There was none.

E. Board Members’ Reports

Discussion/Action

1) Land Trust

Mr. Carpenter said that Land Trust Days took place last Saturday with good attendance.

2) Conservation Commission

No report was available at this time.

F. Planner’s Report

Discussion/Action

1) June & July 2016

Mr. Carpenter and Mr. Carey noted an increase in commercial solar, and Ms. King elaborated that it seems a lot of potential projects are hitting a snag at the National Grid level.

Mr. Sparks inquired after the status of in-process solar tax treaties and how they’ll be affected by the pending state rate, and Ms. King explained that the state has until the end of November to establish said rate but that any tax agreement entered into before then will hold valid. It is also unclear whether a PILOT would be acceptable even after the November deadline. Mr. Sparks additionally brought up gun shops versus gun ranges in an AR zone, perplexed that where gun ranges can be located is more lenient than gun shops. Mr. Mercier queried whether any development had been brought to Planning’s attention for Route 6/94 or Gene Allen Road, and Ms. King answered in the negative; this prompted brief discussion on tolling. Mr. Mercier also asked after the youth athletic fields, and Ms. King explained that the Town is continuing work on them according to the approved plans. Mr. Carey expounded that site work for the athletic fields has only gotten so far as clearing, stumping, and some grading. Mr. Carey requested more information on mention of Nickle Creek Vineyard and events, and Ms. King told the Board that recently the Vineyard seems to have branched into rentals and that whether a kitchen was built to accommodate these bigger events became a concern for the Building Official.

Mr. Carey placed the Reports on file.

J. Major Land Development

Discussion / Action

- 1) Pre-Application of applicant Foster Renewables, LLC and owners Walter H. & Cynthia M. Steere to construct a 996 kW (0.996 MW) DC ground-mounted solar installation encompassing approximately 5.69 acres and co-located with active agricultural fields and related access drives, lease area, and National Grid contract; located at 0 Theodore Foster Road on 55.49 acres, being Plat 18 Lot 9 in an Agricultural / Residential AR district, and requesting to combine Preliminary and Final Plan approvals.

Julie Beauchemin, project manager with Foster Renewables, LLC which is a wholly owned subsidiary of Nexamp, introduced the 996 kW solar proposal as encompassing about 5-6 acres on the 55-acre parcel. A 40-year lease agreement for the 5-6 acres has been entered into with the Steeres, and a Certificate of Eligibility with National Grid has been obtained.

Kevin DeMers, registered professional engineer for DiPrete on the project, pointed out the similarities of natural features (adjacent swamps, lots on Maple Rock Road) and physical proximity to Nexamp's previous solar application on Theodore Foster Road. Mr. DeMers stated that a full RIPDES permit with DEM will be sought, and listed the access points as a gravel road to the installation with a hammerhead for turnarounds and a path off of the road to the cemetery straddling the site. The facility will meet all setbacks, and although the site is an old orchard field it will require minimal tree clearing at the edges.

Ms. Parmentier asked for clarification on existing tree cover that will need to be cut, and Mr. DeMers illustrated on the plan that it will be at the southwest portion of the project by the access drive and on the far eastern side of the panel area; 1-2 acres total cleared is a reasonable estimate. The site is currently agricultural use.

Walter "Bob" Steere, owner, spoke up that he has apple orchards on the property that he is slowly converting to hay fields, with a future plan for Christmas trees- he would have cleared these trees anyway even if the array weren't proposed. Mr. Mercier expressed concern for where trees will be planted, and Mr. Steere told him that it will be over 14 acres away.

Mr. DeMers assured the Board that, after analysis, any stormwater issues associated with the gravel driveway will be resolved accordingly. There will be grass under the panels. Ms. Beauchemin added that the array is usually mowed twice a year.

Mr. Mercier questioned access to the far west section of the installation for EMS, and Alan Clapp with Nexamp remarked that the road shown will primarily be for construction vehicles but there will be at least 15 feet wide around the interior perimeter intended for access vehicles.

Mr. Carey queried how steep the slope and how wet the land is there, and Mr. DeMers said that it is dry and any slopes will be graded properly.

Mr. Mercier stressed that the Engineering Board should be consulted for these types of land development proposals to ensure that the protective measures offered are ok with the first responders. Mr. Carpenter commented that the electricity will be underground so maintenance should be minimal, but consideration must be given to how the array is anchored to the ground. Mr. Clapp responded that it will most likely be anchored with screws. Mr. Carpenter cautioned that the applicant may find that some improvements must be made to the 15' perimeter. Mr. Mercier noted the need to have a lock box at the gate with keys for EMS, and asked about emergency lighting. Mr. Clapp replied that there is typically no lighting and crews bring their own.

Mr. Sparks noticed that Note #1 on the survey sheet is incorrect. Mr. Clapp detailed that National Surveyors did check the monuments this year and added ~10 acres of new topography to the survey.

Mr. Carpenter recalled the condition for annual EMS training and contact updates from prior solar projects, and Mr. Mercier declared that it might be helpful to get feedback from EMS after these larger solar installation trainings begin.

Ms. Parmentier told the applicant that it will be good to know the general style and materials for the panels by the Master Plan review stage, and didn't see the necessity for any interior perimeter access to be gravel.

There was nothing further from the Board that they would like to see included with a Master submission.

Ms. Parmentier wondered if any abutter concerns were already known, and Mr. Steere answered that the Roukous' had actually encouraged the Steeres to pursue this project.

There was general Board consensus to hold off on a vote to combine the Preliminary and Final until the Master review.

N. Comprehensive Plan Update

Discussion

Ms. King said that she had seen the consultant last Friday but there is nothing concrete from Mason yet. Discussion ensued on how and when chapters will be reviewed.

O. Future Agenda Items

Discussion

The Board asked that review of land development stages be added, and to strike TDR & Villages.

P. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn at 8:26 p.m. was approved unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Helen Hardy, Secretary