

CASTLETON PLANNING COMMISSION
Tuesday, December 14, 2021
Castleton Town Office
and ZOOM

Those in attendance included: Michael Holden, Elizabeth MacKay, Joseph Bruno and Jonas Rosenthal Zoning Administrator. Ed Bove, Fred Laramie, Robert Spaulding

Others present by Zoom included: Sandy Mayo, Kathy Laramie, Nick and Vicky Lanko, Kat Murray, Allison Harvey, Recording Secretary,

J. Bruno called the meeting to order at 7:00 P.M.

Appoint New Vice Chair

M. Holden made a motion to appoint Liz Mackay as Vice Chair J. Bruno seconded. All voted in favor. So voted.

Approve Agenda

M. Holden made a motion to approve the agenda. L. MacKay seconded. All voted in favor. So voted.

Minutes of Meeting – November 23, 2021

M. Holden made a motion to approve the minutes of November 23, 2021 as presented. L. MacKay seconded. All voted in favor. So voted.

Public Comment – None at this time.

Sam Carlson – Grandpa's Knob Wind Turbine Presentation

Sam Carlson stated he is community relations for this project with a presentation to make. There are three reasons for this project: To honor the past and those who built the world's first wind turbine connected to an electric grid 80 years ago, to share the economic benefits for 20-25 years, and the environmental benefits that are in line with global warming solutions. All of those involved in the project are all Vermonters, David Blittersdorf is the primary project investor, along with multiple Vermont companies involved in the planning and development and the electric utilities will be recipients of power.

The basic facts of the project, it is a 1.5 mw tower, just less than 300 feet in height, with 3 blades, each 143 feet long. From the base of the tower to the tip of the blade is 438 feet and about 110 feet of that total is below the ridgeline. The net elevation to the tip of blade is the same height as the existing 310 foot communication tower that is there now. The turbine will generate 4 million kilowatt hours a year assuming it's at maximum capacity. They have met with the RRPC, other towns so far, and also meeting with LBA, Rutland Town Planning Commission trying to get as much info out as possible to be transparent about it. Mr. Carlson also stated that back in 2012, they tried to put up 20 turbines by another developer, and it was difficult for the many that were involved, and they are trying to create a different experience than that.

As to the environmental impact, there is already a road from 1941, and it is still being used to service the communication tower that is already there. There are existing power lines to the existing tower as well. They would have to string an extra line, but nothing to be taken down or disturbed. The concrete pad will be less than 20 sq yds. They will have to do geotechnical assessment of the existing rock, which is scheduled for January and will need to clear less than an acre of vegetation for construction equipment, etc. After the project is done, the area would be revegetated. There is also a project scoping meeting scheduled in January with the Agency of Natural Resources.

Visibility – Mr. Carlson presented the five-mile view shed map, indicating that in the dark purple areas you will be able to see the tower and blades, primary spots being Hubbardton Battlefield and Lake Bomoseen, also some areas in Hubbardton and in Castleton at Brown's Four Corners on Route 30. In the light purple areas, the tower is not visible, but the tips of the blades are. He also stated that you can go to project website and see simulated views/visual renderings of the project. The Town of Castleton has the greatest visibility, followed by Hubbardton, West Rutland and Pittsford.

Timeline – The contract was signed last week with the utilities committee at 11.6cents /kilowatt hour for 20 years. This is only a promise by the State that if the project is approved and moves forward, it is a promise for electricity to be purchased when generated. There are also federal infrastructure bills that could affect financials.

There's still about a year of analysis, dialogue and discussion, hearings and meetings still to come. Mr. Carlson stated they would like to come back in May of next year, as well as to the Board of Selectmen and hope to have information about the infrastructure, Green Mountain Power and financials, etc. Everything tonight is projected and would all be different in May

It is a common question of would the project set a precedent. They believe the answer is no. Agency of Natural Resources issued a letter to the promoter of the 2012 project stating the ridge line has irreplaceable habitat, developing it with multiple turbines would cause irreparable harm to environment. Based on that they feel a permit would not be approved by the State. They will also submit a promise that anything further would not be applied for in the future, they are interested in a single turbine only, nothing more. Further discussion and explanation of the already existing road, power lines, etc., and that the project would cause very little disruption to environment, etc.

L. MacKay asked about the hub term – it was stated that is the top of the tower. M. Holden asked about existing road and changes to it, as he feels taking a 144 foot blade up there or a crane without doing anything to the existing would be impossible. Mr. Carlson stated there is a sharp curve that needs to be widened, and they would use stabilizing road mats and they will be removed when done.

Fred Laramie – a few weeks ago there was a question at a Board of Selectmen meeting about icing and fines that have been placed on other projects. Mr. Carlson stated he was not aware then of that incident, but he is now. Mr. Laramie felt they are not being transparent when they don't bring up the down sides and negative issues, ie icing and rocks flying, health issues, etc. J. Bruno asked

what rock was from, Mr. Laramie stated he believed it was from blasting. Further discussion on icing and how it affects the operation of the turbine and the project.

Bronson?? Asked about the principals of the project and the companies involved and where they stand. Mr. Carlson stated Mr. Blittersdorf, grew up in Pittsford and has developed a company out of Hinesburg that is wind and solar related. Reviewed the other companies that are involved, engineers, etc.

Bob Spaulding asked about blade icing and how that is monitored. Mr. Carlson stated he believed they are controlled remotely, the hub has sensors for spin, speed, weight, etc., so when the blade ices, it gets heavier, affects spin, and monitoring is alerted. He would get a clearer answer to the question for a future meeting.

Nick Lanko stated they have heard only benefits and asked if Mr. Carlson could discuss the benefit for the local landowners and neighbors. Mr. Carlson stated haven't gotten that far, other than they will share the revenues of the project within the communities. Mr. Lanko stated he is looking more for the locals, within less than a mile, the landowners. He doesn't want to get into the negatives, as he has a long list, but he felt Mr. Carlson has not gotten into the effects on the landowners yet, such as changes to property values. Mr. Carlson stated he does not have any knowledge on that. Mr. Lanko also stated he felt the view shed is not very accurate, and doesn't address the sounds, the road condition to the site. Mr. Carlson stated they trying to relay the best information possible. Mr. Lanko also addressed the Hubbardton Battlefield – it is one of most intact battlefields in the US, and he doesn't feel it honors the history at all when this project is visible from there. Mrs. Lanko stated that this is the second time they have had to fight for their property. She doesn't understand how one property owner can turn a residential area into an industrial power plant and expects everyone to just go along with it. J. Bruno stated it hasn't happened yet, it is an uphill battle for the developer, they are not getting a lot of support from anyone, and feels is an unfair question to ask tonight. There will be more hearings, this is just the beginning.

Discussion of Stone Mill Solar LLC project – 2.2 MW Solar Project before the PUC

J. Bruno asked E. Bove to let board know what process is for the solar array project being proposed, seemed it was 5 acres and now is 15 acres and they have skirted around the town and has taken out any input out of their hands. Originally it was up to the Planning Commission to make a preferred site, but because of the size, there is no such thing as preferred site as far as the town regulations are concerned, it becomes State. Mr. Bove stated that it is the same as the turbine project, because of the size, it is State level. Originally, he thought there was a 30-day comment period, but again, because of size, he has found out there is no time limit to submit comments.

Mr. Bove further stated that anything that goes through the State Act 248 process, solar, turbine, telecommunication, skirts the towns regulations that the projects are located in. There is no review or local input for the towns involved. The Town Plan, unless it has an enhanced energy plan, might limit industrial and commercial development in certain areas, but not likely. The members discussed language that could be put into a town plan that will limit what can be put where. In previous revisions, there was controversy with the language of the town plan and certain zones

and what was allowed, and it wasn't put into the plan like it could have been. Mr. Bove stated they can usually spell out specific sights and put restrictions on them, but that has not been done.

J. Bruno asked if the RRPC had received the project proposal, Mr. Bove state they have, and it is going to be discussed at next meeting in January. He also stated that the problem is that it doesn't violate any of the regional, nor the local regulations. J. Bruno asked if the town could attend the PUC meeting, Mr. Bove stated they could. J. Rosenthal asked if it is too late to modify the town plan even though is already filed. Mr. Bove stated it is not too late, including language that restricts or takes out certain plots/areas of the town. If something doesn't fit in town plan, it doesn't fit in the regional plan either.

After brief discussion, J. Rosenthal stated he would get in touch with Mr. Bove to discuss language and changes. Mr. Bove also distributed a revised map/plan for review and stated he would need any comments or changes so he can get it into a final draft form.

J. Rosenthal stated he would like to discuss the language of the industrial/commercial and any restrictions in the main corridors. Members discussed the Route 4 corridor and minimum requirements for zoning in the industrial zone and how they might limit the size of projects/arrays. It was felt they don't necessarily want to limit types of development on the few industrial sites there are in the town. They also briefly discussed screening and fencing. J. Rosenthal suggested a 1000-foot setback from State lands and M. Holden stated they could limit the size of projects to 2 acres. J. Rosenthal also stated that wind and solar projects don't create jobs, and using the industrial lands for these types of projects, limits the development of projects that would create jobs. For wind, J. Bruno suggested language that would preserve historical sites. He also compared solar to wind, and the footprint of each that creates the same amount of energy. Discussion on a recommendation previously made by selectboard member J. Mark that should be used and Mr. Bove had indicated he would make the verbiage less. It was felt they should focus on solar mounted roof tops, 2 acres or less for project size and preserve commercial/industrial land for job growth.

Adjourn Meeting

M. Holden made a motion to adjourn at 8:30 P.M. L. MacKay seconded the motion. All were in favor and the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,

Allison Harvey, Recording Secretary