

**TOWN OF CASTLETON
PLANNING COMMISSION
Tuesday, January 14, 2020 at 7:00pm
Castleton Town Hall
263 VT – 30
Bomoseen, VT 05732**

PRESENT: Janet Currie, Chair; Joe Bruno, Vice Chair; Robert Franzoni, Planning Commission member; Jonas Rosenthal, Zoning Administrator; Eliza LeBrun, Recording Secretary/Planning Commission alternate; Ralph Meima, Director of Development at Green Lantern.

ABSENT: Val Waldrun, Planning Commission member; John Pintello, Planning Commission member

CALL MEETING TO ORDER

Ms. Currie called the meeting to order at 7:03pm.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Mr. Bruno made a motion to approve the agenda. Mr. Franzoni seconded the motion, all were in favor and the motion passed.

MINUTES FOR APPROVAL

Ms. LeBrun made a motion to approve the minutes of the December 10, 2019 Planning Commission meeting. Mr. Franzoni seconded the motion. Mr. Bruno recused himself as he was not in attendance for this meeting. All remaining present members were in favor and the motion passed.

DISCUSSION OF CURRENT INITIATIVES & STATUS UPDATE

Mr. Rosenthal reported the paperwork for the Municipal Planning Grant was approved. Ed Bove plans to come to the meeting on January 28th to discuss the Municipal Planning Grant and adopting an enhanced energy plan. The enhanced energy plan will cost an estimated \$2,500.00, it could be less if the Planning Commission assists. Mr. Rosenthal explained that the \$2,500 could be paid over 2 fiscal years. There is money in the budget to do this. The Planning Commission can make a recommendation which Mr. Rosenthal will present this to the Town Manager who will share it with the Select Board.

Mr. Franzoni made a motion for the Planning Commission to allocate \$2,500.00 over the next 2 years to be paid to the Rutland Regional Planning Commission for an enhanced energy plan. Mr. Bruno seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed.

Ms. Currie shared that she and Mr. Rosenthal attended an Act250 hearing for resident Todd Boutwell. Discussion was held regarding the new members of the Act250 Committee. The Act250 Committee will deliberate and will request more information before making a decision. It was noted that there were Select Board members and Planning Commission members in attendance at this meeting.

Ms. Currie referred the Commission to the last meeting where Mr. Phil Leamy came in to talk about the Cannabis Ordinance. This has been removed from the ballot by the Select Board. Ms. Currie believes that the Town should continue to think about bringing in cannabis/hemp industry.

Mr. Bruno noted that recreational marijuana seems to be the issue. However, to ask citizens to approve bringing them in is premature. Once the state approves the sale of recreational marijuana, then the

Planning Commission should invite the public in to discuss inviting industry into Castleton. This conversation led to a discussion of the pro's and cons of bringing different stores into Castleton.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Ralph Meima of Green Lantern was present to share information about a new Solar Array that Green Mountain is designing on Pete Ruby's land. Mr. Meima wanted to touch base with the Planning Commission to work with them on this project and how the moratorium might affect this project.

Ms. Currie explained that the Planning Commission has requested an 8-month moratorium on any new solar projects that have not been given a Preferred Site letter as the Town is being inundated with applications. The Planning Commission plans to work on an enhanced energy plan to address this. Ms. Currie described the concerns that the Planning Commission have with regard to the size of the panels and whether in a few years they will be obsolete. Ms. Currie also noted that the Town of Castleton does not have a lot of land to develop as much of the land is in the flood plain. The moratorium was approved last night by the Select Board 4 to 1.

Mr. Rosenthal is hoping to clarify what constitutes a preferred site during the moratorium.

Discussion was had regarding tax increases for property owners that place solar arrays on their land and Town and State solar taxes. Mr. Meima believes that the Town should not be assessing new taxes on properties that install solar arrays. Ms. Currie assured Mr. Meima that the Castleton Assessor is very knowledgeable about this and the Commission will speak to her for clarification.

Mr. Meima addressed the Commissions concerns over the possibility of the size of the Solar panels changing. He noted that although technology is improving, it is very slow and gradual. The equipment warranty is 25 years. Within the permits and lease agreements, the Solar company is responsible for removing the panels at the end of the contract. It was noted that in some cases, bonds have been requested for the removal of the solar arrays, but it is not for smaller projects. If an array is over 1 megawatt, it must have decommissioning bond. This is a topic that is currently being reviewed.

Mr. Meima asked the Planning Commission if they knew what the quota was for reaching total renewable energy in Castleton by 2050. Ed Bove should have that information and will most likely bring this to the next meeting.

It was noted that it seems like Vermont has been targeted for solar arrays. Mr. Meima stated that most of the time, the landowners are approaching the solar companies. Mr. Ruby contacted Green Lantern for the solar array they are working on now.

Ms. Currie asked Mr. Meima if our substations were saturated or overloaded. Mr. Meima explained that distributed generation have created Transient Ground Fault Overloaded Voltage (TGFOV). TGFOV basically means power can jump across gaps within substations that it should not be able to. Green Mountain Power has retrofitted one of Castleton's substations to correct this issue. There are maps online that show idle capacity in chosen areas. Green Lantern has sent money to Green Mountain Power for a feasibility study and have not received the answers yet.

Ms. Currie asked if the solar arrays in Castleton can go thru substations in other Towns. Mr. Meima explained that this was not possible because the feeder coming from the Hydeville substation, that is the only feeder you can connect to.

Ms. Currie reassured Mr. Meima that the Planning Commission is not against progress or solar arrays in Castleton, but the Planning Commission needs time to look at all the factors. Discussion was held regarding the importance of having an energy plan and attracting people to move to Castleton.

Mr. Meima stated that Green Lantern will wait until the 8-month moratorium is lifted and the enhanced energy plan is complete. Green Lantern will continue with the feasibility studies and putting together the application until the Town of Castleton is ready.

ADJOURN

Mr. Bruno made a motion to adjourn the Planning Commission meeting at 8:14pm. Ms. LeBrun seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed.

Respectfully submitted; Eliza LeBrun, Recording Secretary