

Shaftsbury Planning Commission

Wednesday July 12, 2023

In person at Cole Hall and remotely via Zoom

As amended

1. Call to order

The meeting came to order at 6:01 p.m. Present were commissioners Naomi Miller (chair), Mike Foley, Martha Cornwell, Chris Williams, and a little later, Nancy Burns. Also present were Norshaft Energy Committee members Bill Christian and Andrea Bacchi (the latter via Zoom), and zoning administrator Shelly Stiles. Ms. Miller noted that a discussion of an official town energy committee would be added to the agenda.

2. Approval of minutes

Ms. Cornwell moved to approve the June 14 minutes. Mr. Williams seconded the motion. Mr. Foley noted that he attended the meeting via Zoom, and was ready to try to answer any questions regarding home energy conservation as best he could. His name was added to the list of attendees. Ms. Cornwell moved to approve the amended minutes. Mr. Williams seconded the motion, which passed 5-0-0.

3. Public comments

Bill Christian and Andrea Bacchi attended to speak to the matter of whether the Town should appoint an official energy committee and, relatedly, whether the Norshaft Energy Committee would consider serving in that capacity. Mr. Christian said there are advantages to having an official Town committee, including that the state encourages this arrangement, that it gives the Town standing with contentious issues, and that it could help with grants. He said "Norshaft would love to stay independent" but would be glad to help the Town any way it could. Ms. Bacchi said other towns, including Dorset, have found non-official committees to be useful. She said she might be willing to serve on a Shaftsbury committee should one be created. She noted that Norshaft has a website, an email group, and a Facebook page, and could use those resources to get the word out for Shaftsbury. Ms. Cornwell and Ms. Miller thanked them both for appearing and said they might reach out to them with questions about the Enhanced Energy Plan. Ms. Miller asked that the question of whether the Town should have an official energy committee will be placed on an upcoming agenda.

4. Draft recommendations of PC re Shaftsbury Solar project

Mr. Williams described his draft memo, in which he outlined recommendations to the PUC, including:

- The two most northerly banks of solar panels should be relocated or deleted in order to provide more screening of the project for existing residences.
- Puckerbrush should be managed using tools other than herbicides.
- The North Bennington and Shaftsbury water boards should approve the relocation of the water line.
- The PUC should create an incentive whereby Shaftsbury residents receive a 5% discount on their electric bill.

In discussion, Mr. Williams noted that Callie Fishburn of BCRC reported earlier in the day that the Shaftsbury Solar project would create about 3500 MW hours of electricity annually, while Shaftsbury uses about 20,400 MW hours annually. Ms. Burns asked how much more rooftop solar might create.

Mr. Foley added points he'd like considered:

- Re the “general” introduction to the memo, the whole town did not vote against the project and the vote was non-binding.
- Re scale, it would be good to buffer adjacent landowners.
- We should ask that puckerbrush be managed by using animals such as sheep (a concept Shaftsbury Solar mentioned at an earlier meeting). Our goal should be to protect our agricultural and working landscapes: Fuel, fiber and food!
- We should acknowledge the taxes the project will generate (although they are minor) and still pursue the electric bill discount.

Ms. Miller and Ms. Cornwell noted that the Select Board has been discussing, confidentially, other contributions the solar company could make to the Town, some of them substantial.

Mr. Williams asked whether the memo shouldn’t acknowledge the project’s negatives.

It was agreed the Select Board wants the PC to take a “yes” or “no” position on the project. Mr. Williams and Mr. Foley will rewrite the memo, to the Select Board rather than the PUC, and will introduce the few “conditions” (briefly stated) with a general paragraph taking a stance in favor of the project.

5. Summer schedule

Dates for meetings were chosen. It was agreed that the July 26 meeting would finalize the recommendation to the Select Board. The August 9 meeting would be via Zoom only and would include setting a date for a hearing on bylaw revisions, dealing with odds and ends, and hearing a presentation from Janet Hurley. The August 30 meeting would be a public meeting hosted by Ms. Hurley on Enhanced Energy Plan.

6. Other business

Mr. Foley said he’d spoken with officials at the Town of Cocksackie, where Freepoint Solar has recently installed a solar farm. Officials are generally happy with the company but noted that the company had been somewhat delinquent in replacing screening vegetation that had died. Ms. Burns suggested adding a requirement that screening be provided and replaced if necessary in the Town’s statement to the PUC.

The meeting adjourned by acclamation at 7:40 p.m.