Minutes

Meeting of the Middlesex Planning Commission
Wednesday, July 17, 2024
6:00 PM
Middlesex Town Clerk's Office
5 Church Street
Middlesex, VT 05602

This meeting was conducted in-person at the Town Clerk's Office and remotely using the town's Zoom account.

Planning Commission Members
Sandy Levine
Elle O'Casey - Absent
Mitch Osiecki
Paula Otenti
Betsy Davis

Kevin Thompson, Zoning Administrator (remote)
Ken Davis, resident (remote)
Lauri Scharf, resident (remote)
Greg & Barb Whitchurch, residents
Aaron Lavallee, Aegis Renewable Energy
Leah Bellus, Aegis Renewable Energy

Call to Order
Chair Sandy Levine called the meeting to order at 6:02 pm.

Roll Call
Planning Commission members Sandy Levine, Mitch Osiecki, Paula Otenti, and Betsy Davis were present. Elle O'Casey was absent.

Others attending the meeting are listed above. All participants were present at the Town Office except Kevin Thompson, Ken Davis, and Lauri Scharf, who participated remotely via Zoom.

Mitch volunteered to record minutes.

Adjustments to Agenda
None

Minutes

Mitch noted that he has shared draft minutes of both the regular meeting of June 19, and the Special Meeting held on July 10, but minutes of both require minor edits to names of attendees.

Betsy moved to approve minutes of June 19 and July 10, with those edits. Paula seconded.
Vote to approve: 4-0.

Old Business:

Special Meeting with Middlesex Village residents (traffic-calming demonstration project)

There appears to be tentative support from village residents for this project.

Motion: Mitch moved that the PC proceed with this project. Betsy seconded.
Vote to approve: 4-0.

Municipal Water System in the Middlesex Village

The Select Board has committed to sending a survey out to village residents soon. A bout of COVID in the office, along with the recent July storm conspired to delay release of the survey.

Mitch will contact Lynette Claudon, of the VT DEC, to see if she is available to address the PC in the coming months to discuss the project.

Walking Trails near Rumney (update)

Paula has researched regulations covering signage and speed control around schools. Will do some additional research to learn more about the cost of signage, mounting hardware, labor, etc.

There may be grant money available to help pay for the necessary expenses.

Mitch shared that he has discussed this project with the Trail Committee. They have expressed support for the idea of a pedestrian path or trail and will be happy to assist.

Because Wrightsville Beach has been clobbered by another July storm, Mitch has not had a chance to talk to Collin O'Neil about this project.

Possible Siting of a Solar Farm on the Galaxy of Yes (Colby Farm) Property

Aaron Lavallee and Leah Bellus, representing Aegis, addressed the Planning Commission about this project. Aegis is partnering with the owners of the Galaxy of Yes (Colby Farm) property and All Earth Renewables to develop a renewable energy project.

Some preliminary work on the property has sought to uncover "problem areas." Those found thus far are largely outside the area targeted for development.

The project developers expect to eventually request a "referred site" letter from the town supporting the project.

They are planning a 500 kW facility. The solar array will run generally parallel to I-89. Most of the project will not be visible from any town roads.

The solar array will be an elevated structure, about 8' off the ground, with a 3-5 degree tilt.

They plan to bury all power lines. The project will connect to Washington Electric Co-op (WEC) distribution lines.

Aaron discussed known and possible constraints on the site, which includes a Class 2 wetland. Aaron noted that all development will occur beyond a 50' buffer from the wetlands.

The developers are working with Bill Powell of WEC.

Most of the property is covered by what are termed prime agricultural soils. The existence of prime agricultural soils does not create an obstacle for development.

Aaron also noted that everything presented tonight represents only conceptual plans. Much work remains before a final proposal is ready for presentation.

There are also some deer wintering sites on the property, but these are again outside the planned development area.

Aaron estimated that permitting requests may begin within 6-12 months.

The observation was made that Middlesex has an Energy Committee, which might have some interest in this project. Some of tonight's guests include members of the Energy Committee.

Lauri Scharf commented that the Town Plan identifies several "preferred sites" for renewable energy development, which might prompt further discussion.
Aaron commented that the development site discussed tonight was chosen by property owner Russ Bennett. In selecting the site, considerations included working around areas chosen for septic and other infrastructure development.

The parcel is characterized by uneven terrain. Among the goals of the developers are to avoid unnecessary tree-cutting, earth-moving and other disruption of the site.

Sandy asked if the Energy Committee would be interested in reviewing the project and providing feedback. Members of the EC present indicated that they likely would be.

Aaron mentioned that they plan to request a "development review" from the ANR within the next couple of months.

Kevin Thompson commented that ground-mounted solar arrays work best in conjunction with agricultural uses if the solar panels are elevated above the ground somewhat. That appears to be consistent with what was described for this project.

Aaron and Leah concluded their presentation. Sandy thanked them for attending this meeting and sharing initial details of the project with the PC.

Neighborhood Infill Follow Up

Tabled due to Elle's absence.

Other Business

Work plan update

At a previous meeting, Kevin Thompson suggested a review of zoning maps with the goal of trying to align zoning districts with property boundary lines where practical.

Kevin proposed a second idea: the regulation of "events," either through zoning regulations or town ordinance.

Kevin also reported that a plan has been proposed for the replacement of the church that burned recently. Early stages, of course, but the project appears to be proceeding.

Next Meeting

By consensus, PC agreed to cancel our August meeting.

Next meeting: Wed, Sep 18 at 6:00 p.m.

Adjournment

Paula moved to adjourn; Betsy seconded.

Meeting adjourned at 7:12 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Mitch Osiecki
Planning Commission secretary emeritus