



BCRC Regional Energy Committee Meeting Minutes

July 6, 2023 at 5PM

BCRC Office and Zoom

Attendees: Wayn Goodman (chair), Rob Costantino, Jeannie Jenkins, Jim Hand (on Zoom), Barbara True-Weber (on Zoom), Jim Sullivan

BCRC Staff: Bill Colvin and Callie Fishburn

Wayn Goodman called the meeting to order at 5:05PM.

Approval of minutes from last meeting on January 13, 2023

Motion by Jeannie Jenkins, seconded by Rob Costantino. Motion passed unanimously with one abstention (Sullivan).

Review and Discussion of VT Real Estate Holdings Certificate of Public Good Petition for 20MW Solar Project in Shaftsbury

***The following notes represent initial comments from members of the BCRC Regional Energy Committee and do not constitute BCRC's official comments about the project.*

General Comments from the Regional Energy Committee

- Based on the information filed with the petition, the proposed project appears to comply with the Regional Plan.
- BCRC is working with the Town of Shaftsbury on an Enhanced Energy Plan which will not affect this project.
- The committee feels that the developer has done their due diligence, effort has been made to be transparent and educate the public about the project.
- The committee noted that the developer will set aside significant acreage for conservation, which amounts to more land than will be disturbed by the project.
- The committee noted the developer's Decommissioning Plan which will set aside funds in Escrow to cover future costs of decommissioning, if needed.
 - Jim Sullivan noted he wished the discussion of future decommissioning of solar sites was put in context with the possible continued use for renewable energy production, and the inherent benefits of reuse, at the end of the initial useful life of the project.
- Public opposition appeared to mostly stem from concerns about aesthetics and the viewshed. Committee members reviewed photographs included in the petition which appear to show limited impacts on the views from the proposed project.
- The generating capacity of this project is almost double Shaftsbury's 2050 solar generation goal as outlined in the Regional Energy Plan.
- Electricity generated by this project may not go to Shaftsbury or Vermont specifically, but it will ultimately benefit the region by reducing reliance on fossil fuels. This remains an open question, however, as final contracts for energy purchase have not been finalized.

Elements of the Regional Plan to explore:

- Sections that emphasize the importance of agriculture and maintaining prime agricultural soils could be relevant to the proposed project, however, the committee pointed out that the site of the proposed project has not be used for agriculture for generations and solar is compatible with certain types of agricultural activities such as livestock grazing. Other types of development prevent agriculture more so than renewable energy projects. Prime agricultural soils impacted by the project will be stockpiled on site for future use.
- The Regional Plan also mentions the importance of “visual gateways” and viewsheds and states that commercial-scale solar projects should not be sited in important gateway locations or the foreground of viewsheds that have been deemed valuable by the community. The committee felt that the proposed location is not a gateway, but consideration should be given to the Shaftsbury Town Plan regarding viewsheds and whether the project area has been identified in the plan as an important viewscape.
- The Regional Plan does not really contemplate renewable energy projects of this size, which may have the potential to affect the rural residential character of an area. However, the committee noted that the proposed site is ideal in many ways because of its proximity to three-phase power distribution, and ease of screening.
- A project of this size has substantial regional impact and therefore requires BCRC to provide comments on the project as part of the Section 248 process

Next Steps

- BCRC staff and some committee members may attend the upcoming site visit and public meetings on July 21st to gather more information.
- There will be a follow-up meeting in a few months to review BCRC’s drafted comments on the project.
 - Comments should acknowledge the size of the project and its potential impacts, but also acknowledge the benefits of renewable energy generation in Vermont.

Review of Proposed Stamford Wind Project

Postponed until the next meeting.

There being no other business, the meeting adjourned at 6:20PM