



## BCRC Regional Energy Committee Meeting Minutes

November 12, 2024 at 4:30 PM

Attendees: Wayn Goodman (chair), Jim Sullivan, Rob Costantino, Ellen Maloney, Jim Hand

Michael Melone, Rodney Galton (Ecos Energy), Paul King (abutting landowner)

BCRC Staff: Bill Colvin and Callie Fishburn

### Discussion of Apple Hill Solar Project 45-day Notice

Michael Melone of Ecos Energy gave a presentation on the proposed project. The proposed project is a 2 MW solar array off of Willow Rd in Bennington near the Route 7 and Route 279 interchange. Electricity generated from the project may be sold through the standard offer program or provide power to low-income households through the Solar for All Program.

This project was previously before the PUC as Case #8454 but was denied due to aesthetic concerns; particularly from long-range viewsheds. Mr. Melone outlined steps that the developer has taken to mitigate the visibility concerns including changing the footprint, moving it north, reducing the number of panels, and changing the type of fencing utilized. The developer has engaged an aesthetic and environmental consultant for the project.

Wayn asked about off-takers, photo simulations from other angles, and if the new proposal been reviewed by abutting property owners.

Response from Mr. Melone: The project has a power purchasing agreement through the standard offer contract, but other avenues could be explored including the Vermont Solar for All program which is still pending. They have only created one visual simulation so far – the view from the welcome center, but they are also considering a simulation showing the view from Route 7. There will be minimal impacts and visibility to landowners. No comments received from landowners to date. The upcoming Bennington Planning Commission meeting will provide another opportunity for public comment.

Wayn recommended conversations with GMP about off taking in case the standard offer falls through.

Jim Sullivan mentioned potential visibility from the lookout on the Bennington Area Trail System. Existing solar arrays can be seen from the lookout. This project could have an impact on a significant viewshed in the region – especially the “black box”. Jim recommended a landscape scale perspective – Wayn suggested a viewshed simulation.

Jim Sullivan asked if the town has preliminarily weighed in on the project –

Response from Mr. Melone: The town has a map of preferred sites which does not include this site, but they have a list of criteria that if met, could lead to preferred site designation.

Bill asked about viewshed impacts from Mt. Anthony Country Club, the site access plan, and the threshold for determining if additional screening is needed.

Response from Mr. Melone: They anticipate no issues with the country club. The project site will be accessed via a typical access road off of Willow Rd, and the aesthetic consultant will determine if supplemental visibility mitigation is needed.

Abutting landowner Paul King commented that he appreciated the communication from Melone and the willingness to amend site plans to address concerns. He believes that renewable energy is essential and would like to see the project move forward.

Callie's quick review of the VT Planning Atlas shows that the site does not appear to have any state-identified known or possible constraints

The committee recommended that BCRC should monitor the Town of Bennington's response to the project and meet again to review the full CPG application once it has been submitted.

### **Shaftsbury Solar Project Update**

Callie gave a brief update on the status of the Shaftsbury Solar Project under consideration by the Public Utility Commission. The Department of Public Service filed a memo recommending that the PUC approve the project. The developer has filed a proposed CPG. The developer has also been regularly attending meetings of the Shaftsbury select board to update the town on the project. According to their last update to the town, the temporary access road off of Route 7 has been approved by VTrans, and they expect PUC approval by the end of this year.

### **Other Business**

Update on the Regional Energy Plan – the Regional Plan (which includes the energy plan) has been drafted and is currently in adoption proceedings. The final public hearing and adoption vote will take place at BCRC's next regular commission meeting on November 21<sup>st</sup>.

There being no other business, the meeting adjourned at 5:30 PM