

MINUTES OF THE STRAFFORD SELECTBOARD – SPECIAL MEETING ON SOLAR PROJECT AT
ELIZABETH MINE SITE

June 17, 2015

Members of the public body present: John Freitag, Steve Marx, Toni Pippy, Brent Cadwell, Brian Johnson

Other active participants: Kerry Claffey, Town Moderator, Dori Wolfe, Wolfe Energy, Ron Kelly and Julia Chase of Brightfields Development LLC, Greg White, VP Field Operations and Dorothy Schnure, Spokesperson for Green Mountain Power (GMP), State Representatives Jim Masland and Tim Briglin and over seventy attendants from the public (see attached).

Meeting called to order in Barrett Hall at 7:00 p.m.

John welcomed all those in attendance, introduced participants, and outlined the purpose of the meeting which was to get more information and public input before making a decision on the request for a letter of support for the solar project at the Elizabeth Mine Site. The decision on the request would be made at the next regular Selectboard meeting on June 24. There would be an opportunity for more input once the formal process begins. Specifically, 45 days prior to filing the petition to the Public Service Board, the town Selectboard and planning commission will be given the detailed plans for comment. There will also be at least one local public hearing on the project at which time testimony can be given. While local input is an important part of the process, the final decision on the project is made by the Public Service Board.

John turned the meeting over to Town Moderator Kerry Claffey who went over the agenda and outlined how the meeting would be run. Dori Wolfe gave a power point presentation, “Elizabeth Mine Solar PV Project” (see attached), on the solar project at the Elizabeth Mine Site and where things stood to date. Greg White was up next and talked about how GMP was already bringing a new three phase line into South Strafford due to reliability problems with the old line. He talked about how the project would fit into their distribution of electrical power. Representative Jim Masland and Tim Briglin talked briefly about new legislation which set very high goals and aggressive time frame for more renewable energy.

Kerry opened the floor to questions from the Selectboard. John asked for specifics regarding the amount of tax benefit to the town and the amount the project would contribute to the maintenance of the site now required in perpetuity by the State. Dori could not answer these questions because they are still in negotiations. The town Listers will be involved with determining the taxes assessed by the town. John asked what percentage of the project was in Strafford and Dori showed a slide and most of the panels would be located on the Thetford side of the line but said that much of the infrastructure like the inverters and power lines would be in Strafford. Stephen Marx asked about the possibility for battery back-up at the site to provide power in the case of outages in the overall system. Greg White replied that there is a small scale battery backup site in Rutland for their emergency shelter which is also the regional high school, but at this point widespread and larger use of such a system was not practicable. Kerry then opened the meeting to questions from the floor and for the next hour and one half there were many good and thoughtful questions asked. Some of the things brought up included the following

In regards to safety Bob Bauer questioned whether the increased voltage in the three phase power lines posed a safety risk. Greg White said that they did not and that the new three phase lines were more compact and required less space than older three phase lines common in most communities. Mike Hebb asked for a Materials Safety Data Sheet on the panels. Dori said there were no hazardous materials in solar panels and did not have safety data sheets. Ron Kelley responded to the question in regards to fire and the main thing that must be done is to first shut off the power. He also said that the developers would work with the Town to provide training to the firefighters. The site would be fenced in and security provided by cameras.

There were concerns voiced by nearby residents on the impact of the project, both in terms of traffic and how

it would affect their property values. Dori provided an estimated average of what equals 4 trucks a day during the building phase of the project. Details on trucks, routes and duration of the building phase of the project will be a part of the Section 248 application package submitted in the formal process. She said that previous brownfield and superfund reclamation sites where solar panels have been installed have not resulted in a decrease in property values.

Questions were raised as to the cost of solar power compared to other sources. Dorothy Schnure explained that solar was a small part of the mix of GMP's power and in some ways complemented other sources. For example she said that peak power usage occurs in the summer on the hottest of days. This is when solar produces the most power and when there is often a need to buy very high priced supplementary power. Solar produces less power in the winter and that is when wind power produces the most. She said the interest of GMP was providing the best rates for its customers and they were still in negotiation over the cost of the power that GMP would pay for the power for this project. Melvin Coburn asked about the rate of return for investors on the project. Ron Kelly explained that currently the rate of return was relatively modest at around 5 to 6%.

Eric Thorp and Ned Coffin raised questions about the engineering problems that might occur with a project built on top of a tailing pile with a membrane that could not be disturbed. Ron Kelly, engineer for Brightfields spoke about his company's expertise in this area and that they focused solely on solar projects on landfills and brownfields. He felt confident given this experience in other areas of New England, they could design and install a workable system.

Gus Speth, Sarah Root and others spoke in favor of the project in terms of the need to address the problem of climate change and how that affects not only ourselves but our children and grandchildren. There appeared to be significant support in the hall for these comments.

At the end of the meeting John thanked all those who came and said the Board would be carefully considering all that had been said before a decision on a letter of support is made.

A motion was made to adjourn which was seconded and the meeting was adjourned at 9:05 p.m.

Regular Board Meeting at Town Office on June 24, 2015 at 6 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Toni M. Pippy