

REGULAR MEETING OF THE
PLANNING COMMISSION
6:30 PM, Monday, August 22nd, 2022
MARTIN MEMORIAL HALL, ASCUTNEY VERMONT
DRAFT MINUTES

Members in attendance:

Howard Beach – Vice Chair
Paul Tillman –Chair (online via Zoom)
Joseph Bublat - Clerk

Members not in attendance:

Mike Todd – Member
Tyler Harwell - Member

Other Attendees:

Malia Cordero – Reginal Planning (online via Zoom)
Jason Rasmusion - Reginal Planning
Moreen Bogosian (online via Zoom)
Brian Bosenberg
Beth Gorton
Ken Blum
Beth Hunton
Julie Levy
Mrs Henderson

Attachments: Attachment “A” – Agenda for meeting.
Attachment “B” – Energy Chapter from the Packet

1. Call to order – Meeting was called to order by **Paul Tillman** at 6:35 P. M. **Paul Tillman** handed the meeting over to Vice Chair **Howard Beach**. Both the Chair and Recording secretary are on vacation and gave ample notice for their absents. Paul Tillman attended the meeting so that there could be a quorum and the meeting did not have to be cancelled.
2. Agenda Review – Item umber 6 “Brian Bosenburg – Discussion on scenic resources” will be moved to next month’s meeting agenda.
3. Comments from the Chair and Land Use Administrator – No Comments.
4. Comment from Citizens regarding items not on the agenda. –
 - a. Beth Gorton asked about the land values of land when a 10-acer lot is changed to 3 three acer lots. From C10 to RR3-5. There was no direct answer at this time and the Chair will reach out to the Listers.
 - b. A question was asked about the overlay of what is buildable in the town of Weathersfield and if there will be an overlay on the Town map showing this. The Town is working on getting all the overlays that would show development restrictions in the Town.
5. Approval of Meeting Minutes – August 8, 2022

Paul Tillman made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of August 8th with corrections as needed.

Seconded by Joseph Bublat.

Changes – Mr. Todd was listed as attending twice.

Motion Passed - All in favor

6. Brian Bosenburg – Discussion on scenic resources – Moved to a meeting next Month.
7. Town Plan – Energy section – Jason Rasmuson talked about some history of the town's energy plan and the direction the planning commission wanted to go with this chapter. Jason went over what the planning commission had asked from him and Reginal Planning. The Planning Commission had liked the way Benington's Energy plan looked and was written so Reginal Planning has been focusing on mirroring this plan. Jason R and Maria then asked if there were any question or changes wanted.

Howard stated that Benington had already been to court with their energy plan and that this is one reason the Planning Commission chose this as a starting point. Howard also wanted to say we should indicate that the Town did not want to adapt the state's energy plan. Paul Tillman stated that the Planning Commission was not going to adopt an "Enhanced" Energy Plan at this time.

Ken Blum asked what the town was signing up for with having this energy plan. Jason gave a brief description on this but stated that it was complicated.

Jason then started to go through each section as it was presented and asked if any changes were necessary. Any changes will be collected and made to the document then presented at a future meeting.

Brian Bosenberg asked about the map that the State had for solar and would we publish this. Paul Tillman said that the map the Town would like to publish would show locations that solar or other renewable energy would not be wanted.

Beth Gorton asked about wind power and if the data from the State was accurate.

A comment was made about section 7.2.6, that Heat pumps are not renewable energy.

Terminology and definitions for wind and solar were discussed.

Section 7.3 – 7.4 Jason R said nothing has really changed since May and some data may be dated.

Pg 6 some language clarification no big changes.

Pg 7 Energy goal has some changes. Howard said there may be a few more views added to the scenic view list.

Beth Hunton asked what does community solar mean? Is it funded by the town? Beth said her thought of community solar was like the solar at the town garage. It was asked how big is 150K project, somewhere in the area .15 acers. Julie Levy comment on community solar, in commercial solar it may have a different definition. She encourages the remove "Community", the board agreed.

Beth Gorton asked why there is no support for wind power so far in the plan. Howard indicated that wind was not a large part of the renewable energy available in the Town. Paul Tillman said that renewable wind energy was welcome in the Town if it was available in the area and was constructed within the rules and regulation. Paul wanted to make sure that the plan encouraged all renewable sources solar, wind, water (Hydro).

Pg 8 – pg 9

A question was asked about the process for getting the State energy map. Reginal has the map and will work to reference the town pan and zoning to indicate areas to protect. The challenge will not be working with the State to change the map. We can present a modified map but will be difficult to get the State to change their map. These areas are where the “model’ says solar energy could be and may not even be close enough to a three-phase power source. It will be better to say where we do not want them instead of where they should be.

Brian B asked if we could add to this list. Jason R said yes we can change this list if needed to add or delete items.

Pg 10 nothing really has changed since May.

Howard Beach Asked about d “decommissioned.” Jason said that the PUC generally asks for a decommissioned plan and was not sure if the town could ask for more.

On Pg 11 there is a “preferred areas” highlight where we want to see Solar Energy resources. An audience member said We should delete this and Paul Tillman agreed.

Paul Tillman asked a question about item C. He asked where the State is with the river corridor area definition. Howard beach stated that because of the dams on the river the State is waiting for the relicensing of the plants and will finish after this process.

A question was asked if solar structures are considered structures that are restricted by setbacks bylaws. Jason said that the state has their own restrictions, and they may not be as restrictive as the Towns.

Pg 12 was discussion about the scenic resource inventory list, and the screening ordinances from the Benington chapter was removed.

Pg 13 is mostly new items to look at and we will wait for a future meeting to discuss with a full board in attendance.

Mrs Henderson Asked for copies to be supplied at the library for people to look at. Paul Tillman said he would investigate working with the library to have final draft copies for people to look at throughout the planning process.

Beth Gorton commented on 7.9.1-20 and asked to have added something that would encourage public charging station on each side of the Town.

8. Town Plan – General – No changes or action currently, just a focus on the Energy chapter.
9. Bylaws – PUD Review – Ryan has complied the information and changes but has not had a chance to present the new document to the planning commission.
10. Bylaws – Conditional Use Review – Tabled for now, no work has been done on this.
11. Discussion of Items for Future Agendas – August 26th meeting will have Brian Bosenburg discussion on scenic resources.
12. Any other business that can be legally discussed – No other business discussed.
13. Adjourn – Meeting adjourned at 8:23PM

Joseph Bublat made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:23PM.

Seconded by Paul Tillman, Motion Passed

Respectfully Submitted by,
Paul Tillman



TOWN OF WEATHERSFIELD

LAND USE ADMINISTRATOR'S OFFICE

(802) 674-2626

P.O. BOX 550 ASCUTNEY, VT 05030

landuse@weathersfield.org

Planning Commission Agenda

Martin Memorial Hall – 5259 Route 5, Ascutney, Vermont 05030

Remote option – Zoom details below

Monday, August 22, 2022 – 6:30 PM

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1. Call to Order
 2. Agenda Review
 3. Comments from the Chair and Land Use Administrator
 4. Comment from Citizens regarding items not on the agenda
 5. Approval of Meeting Minutes – August 8, 2022
 6. Brian Bosenburg – Discussion on scenic resources
 7. Town Plan – Energy section
 8. Town Plan – General
 9. Bylaws – PUD Review
 10. Bylaws – Conditional Use Review
 11. Discussion of Items for Future Agendas
 12. Any other business that can be legally discussed
 13. Adjourn

The next regularly scheduled meeting of the Planning Commission will be **Monday, August 12, 2022 - 6:30 PM**, Martin Memorial Hall.

Due to public demand and COVID-19; the Town has changed its public meeting platform from GoToMeeting to Zoom. For computer access, please go to this website, where you will find instructions and links to the meeting: <https://www.weathersfieldvt.org/home/news/public-meetings-zoom>

To join any public meeting via phone, dial (929) 205-6099. When prompted, enter meeting ID 542-595-4364. You will not have a participant ID. Please press # when prompted to skip this section. The passcode for all meetings is 8021.

ATTACHMENT “B”

WEATHERSFIELD TOWN PLAN

ENERGY

7.1 Introduction

We all use energy in many forms to conduct our daily lives. That energy may come from local sources or be imported from outside the town. Either source may be renewable or non-renewable. Renewable energy comes from sources that are naturally replenished and include biomass (wood, corn, grasses, and vegetable oil), the sun (solar), wind, the earth (geothermal), water (hydro), or manure (methane digesters - “cow power”). Non-renewable energy is produced from sources that cannot be renewed by human activity or within the human time scale. These include oil, natural gas, uranium, and coal.

Weathersfield is heavily dependent upon imported, non-renewable sources to meet its energy needs. This chapter provides an analysis of our energy resources and needs, as well as energy scarcity, conservation, costs, and problems in our community.

The 2022 Vermont Comprehensive Energy Plan (CEP) recommends comprehensive consideration of adjustments to the Renewable Energy Standard, including consideration of a low-carbon or carbon-free standard, in addition to 100% RES.

7.1.1 This plan seeks to:

- 7.1.1.1 Help the town identify ways to conserve energy,
- 7.1.1.2 Encourage renewable or lower-emission energy sources for electricity, heat and transportation,
- 7.1.1.3 Encourage a pattern of development that likely results in the conservation of energy,
- 7.1.1.4 Encourage development of appropriately-scaled renewable energy resources,
- 7.1.1.5 Reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and
- 7.1.1.6 Reduce transportation energy demand and single-occupant vehicle use.

7.2 Analysis of Renewable Energy Resources in Weathersfield

Weathersfield has a number of renewable energy systems currently operating. In 2022, these systems include 11 solar hot water systems, 1 windmill, 16 ground-mounted photovoltaic systems, 3 solar trackers, and 44 roof-mounted photovoltaic systems, according to the Vermont Energy Dashboard (www.vtenergydashboard.org/energy-atlas). These existing systems have a capacity of about 1.16 MW. Two additional larger ground-mounted systems have come online more recently than this data represents; one is off VT Route 106 in Perkinsville and another is at the Town Highway Garage. These two additional systems have capacity of an additional 1 MW. The town has significant potential to generate additional renewable energy from biomass, geothermal, hydro, solar, and wind sources.

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ENERGY CHAPTER
DRAFT 08/17/2022

7.2.1 Biomass: The term “biomass” includes bio-diesel, perennial grasses, methane digesters, waste to energy, firewood, and woody biomass.

7.2.1.1 *Bio-diesel*: Bio-diesel is a type of fuel made from vegetable oils, animal fats, or waste cooking oil. It may be used in its purest form or combined with petroleum diesel. It is biodegradable, nontoxic, far less polluting than fossil fuels and may be used in ordinary diesel engines with little or no modification. Bio-diesel may also be produced from waste cooking oil. There are several restaurants in Weathersfield that could provide small amounts of waste cooking oil for conversion to bio-diesel. Any biodiesel use in Weathersfield is by private users; no figures are readily available.

7.2.1.2 *Vegetable oils*: Vegetable oils are derived from oilseed crops such as mustard, rapeseed, or sunflowers. There are no oilseed crops being produced in Weathersfield nor are there the facilities within a reasonable distance to convert the seeds to bio-diesel.

7.2.1.3. *Woody Biomass*: Wood is used in a variety of forms to provide heat or to generate electricity. In the simplest form, wood from trees is split and sold for firewood for wood- burning stoves and furnaces in home heating. The Weathersfield School uses wood chips to heat the school. Wood pellets are also a popular way to provide home heating.

Studies show that burning woody biomass to generate heat is far more efficient than burning it to generate electricity. Additional challenges to using woody biomass for energy production on a large scale are truck traffic (large logging trucks), waste heat (if the biomass is used for electricity production), and carbon dioxide emissions.

According to the Atlas, there are 12,412 acres of wooded land in Weathersfield with an annual potential yield of 5,763 tons of available low grade wood, which are suitable for heat and/or biomass electricity production (0.464 tons Net Available Low Grade Wood (NALG)/acre x 12,412 acres = 5,763 tons of NALG wood). Logging should be done according to acceptable practices.

7.2.1.4. *Perennial Grasses*: There are problems associated with the burning of perennial grasses that must be taken into consideration when considering this fuel source. No perennial grasses are currently being grown in Weathersfield for energy use.

7.2.1.5. *Methane Digesters*: According to Green Mountain Power (GMP), Cow Power, “one cow can produce about 30 gallons of manure a day which, in turn, can generate enough electricity to power two 100-watt incandescent light bulbs

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for 24 hours. The waste from 4-6 cows will generate about 1 kw of electricity” (VT Renewable Energy Atlas). Weathersfield has a number of various types of livestock in town, but no working dairy farms. There are currently no methane digesters in town.

7.2.2 Geothermal: Geothermal, or ground source heating, is the direct use of energy absorbed from the sun at the earth’s surface, and supplemented from the earth’s core. Modern geothermal heating and cooling systems rely on the stable temperature of the earth (55 degrees Fahrenheit), or groundwater in a well, along with an electric heat pump. This technology is not currently financially feasible in Weathersfield.

7.2.3 Hydro: There are three potential sites in Weathersfield for hydroelectric power - Stoughton Pond, Springfield Reservoir, and the Soapstone Dam on the Black River. The Vermont Energy Atlas estimates they have the potential to produce a total of 207 kW of power.

With the abundance of streams in Weathersfield, micro hydro-power (run-of-river) is another alternative that should be considered. Micro hydro-power generation requires as little as two gallons per minute of stream flow and does not require the usual reservoir associated with standard hydro-power projects. Peak power production is in the winter when electricity demands are high. Installation costs and maintenance fees are relatively small in comparison to other technologies.

7.2.4 Solar: Solar energy may be used to generate electricity or thermal heat. It may be stored on-site using batteries or sent to the grid via net-metering. Solar hot water does not require batteries or net-metering. There are an increasing number of net-metering sites in Weathersfield.

7.2.5 Wind: The map of potential wind resources shows only modest potential for utility- (70 meters or 230 feet tall at the hub) or commercial-scale (50 meters or 164 feet tall) wind power in town. Residential-scale (30 meters or 98 feet tall) wind appears to be the only reasonable option given prevailing wind speeds, land ownership, and proximity to three phase power lines.

7.2.6 Heat pumps: An increasing number of air source cold-climate heat pumps are being used in the town as a highly efficient source of heat and air conditioning. Cold-climate heat pumps are also referred to as air-source heat pumps, mini-splits or ductless heat pumps. These systems are a good option to retrofit existing houses, and can be used to supplement the existing heating system. They also provide air conditioning during the warmer months. Ground source (geothermal) heat pumps may also be suitable option. Heat pump water heaters are also an energy efficient option.

7.2.7 Summary of Renewable Resources: In summary, it appears that there are several ways that Weathersfield residents and the town government could reduce their non-renewable, imported energy dependencies through the development and use of locally produced, renewable energy fuels.

7.2.8 All development of renewable energy in Weathersfield should be consistent with land use, conservation, and other goals described elsewhere in this plan.

7.3 Analysis of Non-Renewable Energy Resources in Weathersfield

Fuel oil and propane for home heating, cooking, and hot water are delivered to Weathersfield residents from commercial sources outside the Town. The only reserves for home heating fuel in the Town are the storage tanks on municipal and private properties.

Transportation is fueled primarily with gasoline or diesel fuel that is likewise imported to the Town by various distributors in the area. The only storage facilities in Town for any of these energy resources are the gasoline storage tanks at the gas stations in Town, the storage tanks at the Town Highway Garage, and some at commercial and residential locations.

Electricity is brought to the majority of Weathersfield homes and businesses via the “grid.” The electricity traveling in the grid is produced from both renewable and non-renewable sources. The Town is crisscrossed by numerous distribution and transmission lines belonging to both Vermont Electric Power Company (VELCO) and GMP. The substation in Ascutney was upgraded to a newer design that will be more reliable than the previous design.

7.4 Analysis of Energy Scarcity and Needs in Weathersfield

7.4.1 Scarcity

Weathersfield does not have any local sources of non-renewable energy. The scarcity or abundance of non-renewable sources is entirely dependent on factors beyond the town.

Weathersfield has a variety of local sources of renewable energy, as discussed in detail in Section 1.2 above. The potential of renewable energy at each specific site will depend on site conditions (e.g. solar access). Factors, such as droughts, may limit micro-hydro opportunities.

7.4.2 Needs

Weathersfield residents, like many Vermonters, are highly dependent on non-renewable energy, although each year residents and business owners invest in more renewable systems. Many are encouraged to do so with existing incentives through Efficiency Vermont or Green Mountain Power. Additional incentives are needed to encourage more residents to invest in energy efficiency improvements and renewable energy systems, especially for retirees and lower-income residents.

According to data compiled for a planning base year of 2015 by the Mount Ascutney Regional Commission, there were 76 businesses in town and it cost an average of \$3,159 a year to heat those business structures. The cost would be much higher in 2022 for fuel oil or propane systems, given the volatility of fuel prices.

In 2015, there were an estimated 2,633 registered vehicles in town. About 81% of residents drove to work alone. The average commute time was 24 minutes.

About $\frac{3}{4}$ of all electricity used in Weathersfield is for residences; the rest is used for non-residential uses. The average residence uses 7,211 KWh a year.

7.5 Analysis of Energy Costs

To provide a complete or accurate analysis of energy costs, the Town must establish a baseline of energy costs from municipal buildings, vehicles, and operations and diligently maintain the database to determine where energy costs may be stabilized or reduced.

Cost savings may be realized from:

- 7.5.1 Weatherization of buildings
- 7.5.2 Energy efficient lighting
- 7.5.3 Heating and air conditioning changes to more efficient mechanisms, such as air-source cold climate heat pumps
- 7.5.4 Conservation measures (reduction in use)
- 7.5.5 Fuel-efficient vehicles
- 7.5.6 Analysis of town vehicle operations

7.6 Analysis of Energy Problems in Weathersfield

The primary energy problems in Weathersfield are less efficient older homes and dependence on energy from outside the Town.

Problems could arise in the future as a result of energy projects, such as substantial truck trips generated by a large biomass power plant. The Town should promote future energy projects, but also the carefully review the current and potential impacts of energy projects on costs, aesthetics, natural resources, and the environment.

There are specific areas where the Town's residents would not like to see overhead transmission lines or energy projects (other than roof-mounted solar) that have an undue adverse impact on important scenic resources. They are:

7.6.1 View of Mount Ascutney:

- from Route 131 near 9 Little Ascutney Road (formerly the Joe Stoughton house),
- from the Weathersfield Center Road near 478 Weathersfield Center Road (the Kamel residence),

7.6.2 View from the Weathersfield Center Road, looking west, near 2811 Weathersfield Center Road (Hunter Press),

7.6.3 View from Skyline Drive at the height of the land, looking east,

7.6.4 View of the Center Church and grove.

7.7 Energy Goals

- 7.7.1** To make efficient use of energy, provide for the development of renewable energy resources, encourage weatherization, reduce emissions of greenhouse gases, prioritize energy efficient forms of transportation, and promote land use policies that are likely to result in energy conservation

7.8 Energy Policies

- 7.8.1** Weathersfield has limited potential for utility-scale wind energy development, as areas with sufficient access to consistent wind are generally small in size and more than a mile away from three-phase power lines. The prime wind sites (e.g. Weathersfield Center, Butterfield Hill, Pikes Peak) are relatively close to established residences and/or specifically identified scenic, historic or natural resources in the Town Plan and/or Biologic Natural Areas of Weathersfield. The secondary wind sites (e.g. Skyline Drive, Hawks Mountain, Little Ascutney, Pierson Peak, Mount Ascutney) are largely in scenic or natural resources areas also specifically identified in the Town Plan and/or Biologic Natural Areas of Weathersfield. Development in these areas would have a profoundly negative impact on critical viewsheds throughout the community, as the natural profile of the mountain forms an

iconic backdrop from both in-town and rural valley locations. Because no other locations in Weathersfield have suitable wind resource, infrastructure availability, or are free from significant environmental constraints (Figure 6), no utility-scale (100 KW capacity or greater) wind energy facilities should be located in the town. Smaller scale wind projects, including residential-scale turbines (generally less than 10 KW) and turbines that may be installed at farms, residences or small businesses, up to 100 KW, may be appropriate as long as noise from the turbines does not adversely affect neighboring residential properties and as long as they are not prominently visible from any town-identified historic district.

- 7.8.2 The Town particularly encourages solar energy development, of any scale, on building rooftops.
- 7.8.3 The Town strongly supports the development of residential-scale (up to 15 KW capacity ground-mounted) electricity generation from solar energy at homes, businesses, schools, and other institutions.
- 7.8.4 The Town strongly encourages community solar projects (between 15 KW and 150KW in size) provided they are located on sites identified as having high potential for electricity generation based on solar resource availability and avoid “prohibited areas” as identified below. Moreover, any community solar project located on a site that is not a prohibited/exclusion area shall be considered as being located on a “preferred site” and eligible for all of the regulatory and financial incentives associated with larger scale solar energy installations pursuant to Public Utility Commission Rule 5.100 and 30 V.S.A. Section 248.
- 7.8.5 Any larger scale solar development (greater than 150 kW capacity) shall be subject to the following Solar Energy Facility Siting Policy and Map, and the Solar Electric Facility Siting Guidelines.
- 7.8.6 **Solar Energy Facility Siting Policy and Map**

The Solar Energy Resource Map shall serve as a guide for developers wishing to identify land suitable for larger-scale solar energy generation facilities (greater than 150 kW capacity) within the Town of Weathersfield. This map identifies sites which have been determined by the Town of Weathersfield, through official action of the Select Board, to be suitable for solar facilities and sites which are not suitable due to the presence of constraints. Only sites identified as “preferred sites” (on this map or through the Town of Weathersfield’s Preferred Site Policy) or located in a “preferred area” as defined in the Solar Facility Siting Criteria, below, may be developed with solar generating facilities in excess of 150 KW rated capacity.

The Solar Energy Resource Map shall be used in concert with the Town's Solar Facility Siting Guidelines (incorporating the Community Standards and Siting Criteria) included in this section of the Town Plan to direct the development and design of solar facilities. Although solar energy development at these preferred sites and locations is an appropriate land use, all such development shall be carefully planned to limit adverse impacts to neighboring properties and to public viewsheds, giving consideration to The Town's Solar Facility Siting Guidelines.

The sites indicated on this map as suitable for solar energy development were selected after a thorough analysis of available geographic data, including an assessment of access to solar energy as well as environmental, aesthetic, cultural, and related regulatory constraints. State-identified environmental constraints are discussed in more detail in the Mount Ascutney Regional Energy Plan, and include the following resource areas:

- a) Class 1 and 2 wetlands, vernal pools, and hydric soils;
- b) Mapped river corridors and FEMA-defined floodways;
- c) Natural communities and rare, threatened, and endangered species;
- d) Federal wilderness areas;
- e) "Primary" and "Statewide" significant agricultural soils;
- f) FEMA-defined special flood hazard areas;
- g) Lands protected for conservation purposes;
- h) Deer wintering areas; and
- i) State-identified high priority "Conservation Design Forest Blocks."

7.8.7 Solar Electricity Facility Siting

The term "solar facility" shall have the following meaning: a solar electricity generation and transmission facility with a 150kW (AC) or greater capacity, including all on-site and offsite improvements necessary for the development and operation, and on-going maintenance of the facility.

The Town of Weathersfield has developed standards for the development of solar facilities for reference and use by facility developers and local property owners and for consideration in Section 248 proceedings (30 VSA §248). These standards are set forth below. In addition, the Weathersfield Planning Commission, in consultation with the Mount Ascutney Regional Commission, has identified and mapped those areas of Weathersfield that are most suitable for solar facility development based on facility siting requirements and municipal energy, conservation, and development policies and objectives set forth in the Weathersfield Town Plan.

7.8.7.1 Community Standards

The following community standards are to be considered in undertaking municipal solar electricity projects and programs, in updating Weathersfield's Zoning Bylaws to address solar facilities subject to local regulation, and in the review of any new or upgraded solar facilities in excess of 15 kW capacity, by the Town of Weathersfield and the Public Utility Commission (Section 248 review).

- a) **Plan Conformance:** New solar facilities and proposed system upgrades should be consistent with the Vermont Comprehensive Energy Plan, the Vermont Long-Range Transmission Plan, and utilities Integrated Resource Planning (IRP).
- b) **Benefits:** A demonstrated statewide public need that outweighs adverse impacts to local residents and resources must be documented for municipal support of new solar facilities located within or which may otherwise affect Weathersfield. Facility development must benefit Town of Weathersfield and State residents, businesses, and property owners in direct proportion to the impacts of the proposed development.
- c) **Impacts:** New solar facilities must be evaluated for consistency with community and regional development objectives and shall avoid undue adverse impacts to significant cultural, natural, and scenic resources and aesthetic values identified by the community in the Weathersfield Town Plan and the Scenic Resources Inventory. When evaluating impacts of a proposed solar facility under the criteria set forth in this Town Plan, the cumulative impact of existing solar facilities, approved pending solar facilities, and the proposed solar facility shall be considered. It is explicitly understood that a proposed solar facility which by itself may not have an adverse impact may be deemed to have an adverse impact when considered in light of the cumulative impacts of the proposed solar facility and existing solar facilities and pending already approved solar facilities.
- d) **Decommissioning:** All facility certificates shall specify conditions for system decommissioning, including required sureties (bonds) for facility removal and site restoration to a safe, useful, and environmentally stable condition. All hazardous materials and structures, including foundations, pads, and accessory structures must be removed from the site and safely disposed of in accordance with regulations and best practices current at the time of decommissioning.

7.8.7.2 Solar Facility Siting Criteria

Weathersfield supports development of solar energy generation facilities consistent with the policies and guidelines set forth in this plan. It recognizes that financial considerations require projects to be located in close proximity to electric power lines capable of distributing the load proposed to be generated and to have convenient access from major transportation networks for construction. However, the Town desires to maintain the open landscape and scenic views important to Weathersfield's sense of place, tourism economy, and rural cultural aesthetic. Not all solar facilities proposed can meet this standard. Projects must meet the following criteria in order to be supported by this Town Plan:

- a) **Siting Requirements:** New solar facilities shall be sited in locations that do not adversely impact the community's traditional and planned patterns of growth of compact village centers surrounded by a rural countryside, including working farms and forest land. Solar facilities shall, therefore, not be sited in locations that adversely impact scenic views, roads, or other areas identified in the Scenic Resources Inventory, nor shall solar facilities be sited in locations that adversely impact any of the following scenic attributes identified in the Scenic Resource Inventory: views across open fields, especially when those fields form an important foreground; prominent ridgelines or hillsides that can be seen from many public vantage points and thus form a natural backdrop for many landscapes; historic buildings and districts and gateways to historic districts; and, scenes that include important contrasting elements such as water. The impact on prime and statewide agricultural soils currently in production shall be minimized during project design.
- b) **Preferred Areas:** The following areas are specifically identified as preferred areas for solar facilities, as they are most likely to meet the siting requirements:
 - Roof-mounted systems;
 - Systems located in proximity to existing large scale, commercial or industrial buildings;
 - Proximity to existing hedgerows or other topographical features that naturally screen the entire proposed array;
 - Reuse of former brownfields;
 - Facilities that are sited in previously disturbed areas, such as gravel pits, closed landfills, or former quarries;
 - Areas specifically identified as suitable for solar facilities on the Solar Energy Resource Map.



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- c) **Prohibited (Exclusion) Areas:** In addition to those areas that do not meet the siting requirements set forth above, development of solar generating facilities shall be excluded from (prohibited within), and shall not be supported by the Town, in the following locations:
- Floodways shown on Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs);
 - River corridors as shown in the Town of Weathersfield Zoning Bylaws;
 - Class I or II wetlands;
 - A location that would significantly diminish the economic viability or potential economic viability of the town's working landscape, including productive forest land and primary agricultural soils (as defined in Act 250 and as mapped by the U.S. Natural Resource Conservation Service);
 - Rare, threatened, or endangered species habitat or communities as mapped or identified through site investigation, and core habitat areas, migratory routes and travel corridors;
 - Ridgelines and significant vantage points;
 - Steep slopes (>25%);
 - Surface waters and riparian buffer areas (except for stream crossings);
 - Topography that causes a facility to be prominently visible against the skyline from public and private vantage points such as roads, homes, and neighborhoods;
 - A site in proximity to and interfering with a significant viewshed identified in the Scenic Resource Inventory (see Section 7.6 and Section 5.3);
 -
 - A site that causes adverse impacts to historical or cultural resources, including state or federal designated historic districts, sites and structures, and locally significant cultural resources identified in the municipal plan. Prohibited impacts to historical and cultural resources include:
 - Removal or demolition;
 - Physical or structural damage, significant visual intrusion, or threat to the use;
 - Significant intrusion in a rural historic district or historic landscape with a high degree of integrity;
 - Significant visual intrusion into a hillside that serves as a backdrop to a historic site or structure;
 - Creating a focal point that would disrupt or distract from elements of a historic landscape;

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- A significant intrusion in a rural historic district or historic landscape that has a high degree of integrity;
 - Impairing a vista or viewshed from a historic resource that is a significant component of its historic character and history of use;
 - Visually overwhelming a historic setting, such as by being dramatically out of scale;
 - Isolating a historic resource from its historic setting, or introducing incongruous or incompatible uses, or new visual, audible or atmospheric elements.
- d) **Mass and Scale:** Except for projects located on preferred sites, solar facilities larger than 10 acres, individually or cumulatively, cannot be adequately screened or mitigated to blend into the municipality's landscape and are, therefore, explicitly prohibited.
- 7.8.8 Energy audits should be conducted prior to undertaking major improvements to Town-owned buildings, and the Town should invest in priority energy efficiency upgrades as called for in energy audit.
- 7.8.9 All applicable new and renovated buildings are subject to the Vermont Residential Building Energy Standards or Vermont Commercial Building Energy Standards.
- 7.8.10 The Town encourages other methods to exceed the state energy code, such as through passive solar building orientation to take advantage of heating from the sun, landscaping to shade buildings and reduce summer temperatures, or using the "Energy Star" building performance rating system.
- 7.8.11 The current land use pattern requires people to drive to work and other amenities; encourage new housing, businesses, and other amenities in walkable/centralized areas. The reduction of sprawl and low-density development not only reduces energy consumption, but also can improve the local and regional economy. Refer to Future Land Use Map.

7.9 Energy Recommendations

- 7.9.1 Consider adopting a freestanding solar screening bylaw under 24 V.S.A. §4414 (15).
- 7.9.2 The Town of Weathersfield may participate in the Public Utility Commission's review of new and expanded generation facilities to ensure

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that local energy, resource conservation, and development objectives are identified and considered in proposed utility development. This may include joint participation and collaboration with other affected municipalities and the Mount Ascutney Regional Commission for projects that may have significant regional impact. It is acknowledged that the PUC's primary focus is on administering state public policy and regulating actions that are directed at ensuring that utility services promote the general good of the state.

- 7.9.3 The Planning Commission, in consultation with the Select Board, should develop guidelines to direct local participation in Section 248 proceedings related to solar facilities located in Weathersfield or in neighboring communities which may affect the town. The guidelines should reflect levels of participation or formal intervention in relation to the type, location, scale, operation, and magnitude of a proposed project, and its potential benefits, detriments to, and impacts on the community.
- 7.9.4 Inform residents about Efficiency Excellence Network (EEN) contractors by providing links to EEN information through a municipal website or through other means.
- 7.9.5 Participating in the Safe Routes to School program will help reduce reliance on vehicle transport.
- 7.9.6 Inform residents and business owners about existing energy efficiency programs and incentives, especially weatherization services and financing options for low-to-moderate income household.
- 7.9.7 Appoint an Energy Coordinator or establish an Energy Committee to help implement recommendations in this Chapter.
- 7.9.8 The Town of Weathersfield should actively support programs that identify older buildings with energy inefficiencies, and provide funding for weatherization of homes, particularly of lower-income or vulnerable residents. Older buildings will benefit from air-sealing, insulation, and other weatherization work. Weatherization has been shown to have positive health benefits such as lower rates of asthma and respiratory illness.
- 7.9.9 Hold an information forum such as Button Up, and invite residents to speak about the energy improvements that they have made to their homes. Provide data that demonstrates why these improvements make sense for residents.
- 7.9.10 Assess the life cycle costs of potential energy improvements during design and construction planning. For example, investment in a new, efficient heating system may be more expensive up front, but more economical to operate over time.

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- 7.9.11 Promote and support the Green Saving Smart program to teach financial literacy and help residents understand/maximize the cost-saving options available to them.
- 7.9.12 Promote the use of cold climate heat pumps with education/presentations in coordination with the EEU's/electric utilities.
- 7.9.13 Promote the Go Vermont webpage, which provides rideshare, vanpool, public transit and 30 park-and-ride options.
- 7.9.14 Seek grants and partnerships to fund the installation of electric vehicle charging infrastructure at town-owned properties.
- 7.9.15 Coordinate with MARC and Local Motion to promote the planned electric-bicycle lending library to help promote e-bikes as a viable form of travel.
- 7.9.16 Continue to financially support The Moover public transportation services, such as the commuter bus that serves the I-91 Exit 8 park and ride lot, to provide access to jobs for residents and encourage less single-occupant vehicle use.
- 7.9.17 The Town should work with electric and utility contractors to assist homeowners with switching to alternative heating systems such as wood pellet stove and air source heat pumps. Woody biomass can be sourced locally.
- 7.9.18 If renewable energy systems are not practicable, encourage homeowners to replace old furnaces or boilers with a high-efficiency model.
- 7.9.19 Promote wood stove change-out programs that take older non-EPA certified stoves out of service and replace them with more efficient and lower emitting cordwood or pellet stove.
- 7.9.20 Continue to maintain the existing trail networks for walking and other suitable uses.

Signature Page

Howard Beach – (Chair)

Paul Tillman – (Vice Chair)

Tyler Harwell – (Clerk)

Mike Todd – Member

Josh – Member