

Walpole Planning Board Workshop
Town of Walpole
January 22, 2019
7 pm

Present: Planning Board members: Vice-Chair Robert Miller, Selectboard Representative Steve Dalessio, Jason Perron, James Aldrich, Joanna Andros, Jeff Colley, Jeff White. Zoning Board members: Jan Galloway Leclerc and Pauline Barnes.

Mr. Dalessio started the meeting by saying he came away from the last solar workshop meeting understanding that guidelines for residential installations would be addressed by adding them to the building permit and the commercial installation guidelines would be included in a new section on solar installations in the Site Review Plan.

He thought it was the best way to handle the situation since writing an ordinance could take a year or possibly two and wouldn't be ready until 2020 or 2021. It would also have to be vetted by town counsel. Mr. Dalessio also thought the best way to handle size of residential installations was to tie them into the square footage of the home. He later added it could also be proof of the yearly use of electricity. This process would also mean it would be reviewed by the Planning Board and need not be a warrant article at this time.

Solar installations for residences in the village would be a little more difficult because of the size of the non-conforming lots and the closeness of buildings.

Not everybody agreed that the November workshop meeting set a definitive path for solar installation guidelines.

Ms. Andros said she came away from meeting feeling that we had a lot to more to discuss and a lot of possible concerns were raised at that meeting – for example, what to do in the village with historic home. She said it's imperative we have a solar ordinance because solar installations are becoming more and more popular. There are now also so many ways it is being used, for example community solar.

She mentioned that she had recently read in The Sentinel that the city of Keene is doing a one-year study to have the city run on renewable energy by 2030.

Mr. Perron said several times throughout the meeting that the NHSEA Model Solar Zoning Ordinance, prepared by the NH Municipal Association, covered everything that an ordinance needed to have in it. Some of the information in the document did not fit the town of Walpole, but that could simply be removed. For example, in the chart on page 12, which matches zoning district with types of solar installations, industrial solar refers to a use of land that consists of one or more free-standing, ground-mounted solar collections systems regardless of nameplate capacity that is between 25 and 50 acres in solar land coverage. That is virtually impossible in Walpole.

Ms. Barnes said there are so many things to consider for regulations. For example, one topic for discussion could be about glare and refraction. Then there are buffers and screening. What kind of buffers are best for protecting a neighbor from looking straight into a solar panel from a living room window? Then, of course, you have to have setbacks. And maybe a solar easement. One thing she had never considered before was if a homeowner had solar panels in his/her yard and a neighbor constructed a building that blocked the sun from falling on his neighbor's solar panels. What do you do then?

Mr. Colley asked about incorporating the new guidelines around the Master Plan. Mr. Dalessio didn't think that was a good idea. He said it would be better to modify the site plan, he said.

Ms. Andros suggested that a solar ordinance could be written by looking at each zoning district. Several people were in favor of that approach.

But what would you do if there were an apartment building in a residential zone and the owner wanted to put solar panels on the property. Is it a commercial building in the Residential zone? Does it follow residential building guidelines or does it need to go before the Planning Board for a Site Plan Review.

Mr. Perron came back to the NH Solar Model and reiterated that we could model our ordinance by taking guidelines from that document. And he said that since it came from the NH Municipal Association, it would probably have been already vetted.

After an hour of back and forth this is what was decided.

Right now Mr. Dalessio would write guidelines into the building permit for residential installations. It may be in the form of a checklist. The criteria for number of panels would either be the square footage of the home or the total yearly electric bill.

Mr. Colley and Ms. Andros would tackle the commercial guidelines by adding a section to the Site Plan Review that would only be for commercial solar installations.

At the next workshop in February, people attending the workshop would look over the drafts of each document and make comments, changes, adding things and coming up with two final documents, both of which would be reviewed by the Planning Board.

At the same time, a small group will be working on a solar ordinance for the town. That group has yet to be determined. The Public is welcome to be part of the group.

Respectfully submitted,
Marilou Blaine

cc: WPB, ZBA, Town Offices, North Walpole Commissioners, www.walpolenh.us
Posted, Inside town offices, bulletin board outside post office.