

WALPOLE PLANNING BOARD
Workshop Minutes
Tuesday, February 26, 2019

Present: Planning Board members Vice-Chair Robert Miller, Secretary James Aldrich, Jason Perron, Dennis Marcom, Jeff White, Jeff Colley, Joanna Andros, Select Board Representative Steve Dalessio. Zoning Board of Adjustment members Chair Myra Mansouri, Jan Galloway Leclerc, Tom Murray, Pauline Barnes.

Topic of discussion: The Planning Board has been working on temporary solar guidelines for the Residential, Commercial and Industrial districts. The solar guidelines for the Residential district will be distributed when people come in to get a building permit for a solar installation. Mr. Dalessio was responsible for putting together these guidelines.

Solar guidelines for the Commercial and Industrial Districts will be attached to the current Site Plan Review. Anyone building a solar installation in these districts must have a Public Hearing before the Planning Board and present a site plan. Mr. Colley and Ms. Andros were responsible for putting together these guidelines.

Both Boards have looked at solar ordinances from Hollis, Winchester and received a copy of the Peterborough ordinance at the meeting. The Board also looked at the model ordinance from the NH Municipal Association, which is titled NHSEA Model Solar Zoning Ordinance.

These guidelines are temporary and will eventually be replaced by a solar ordinance that will be written over the next year. Then the ordinance will be placed on the warrant and approved by the public when it votes in March 2020 or in March of 2021.

Discussion of Solar Guidelines for properties in the Residential District

Mr. Dalessio went through his guidelines and said they applied to properties located in Walpole and Drewsville but does not apply to properties in North Walpole because anyone building in North Walpole should get a building permit from the North Walpole Commissioners.

Definitions

The document began with definitions of: Solar Photovoltaic System (SES), Solar Arrays, Roof Mounted Solar Photovoltaic System (RMSES) Free-Standing Solar Photovoltaic Systems (PSSSES). Mr. Perron noted if people wanted to they could compare these definitions with the model definitions in the document from the NH Municipal Association on page 12.

General Standards

SESs are permitted on all residential properties located in Walpole and Drewsville under the following conditions:

All setbacks as defined in the Walpole Zoning Ordinance must be adhered to.

Roof Mounted Solar Photovoltaic Systems are encouraged whenever possible or practical.

All electrical work must be performed by a licensed master electrician.

Mr. Dalessio said that this is in the ordinance because some people had submitted building permits and put down the license numbers of a licensed electrician but it had been discovered that the hired electrician was not licensed. Those persons had probably gotten the license number off a licensed electrician's truck, Dalessio surmised. You can depend on licensed electricians to followed the state codes because if they didn't, they could loose their license, he said.

Non-Conforming lots must obtain a Variance from the Zoning Board of Adjustment prior to submitting a building permit application.

Whenever possible or practical Free-standing Solar Photovoltaic System should be positioned with a high consideration to neighboring properties.

Use of natural materials (shrubs, bushes) for screening from view is encouraged.

Use of anti-glare panels is required.

Ms. Barnes read from the model ordinance that says "Mitigation through anti-reflective coating shall have an index of refraction equal to or less than 1.30."

SEs should be properly mounted on concrete pads to withstand weather conditions.

The maximum size of the SES is limited to an average of 12 months of energy for the structure.

Lighting must conform to guidelines in the Walpole Zoning Ordinance.

Documentation

The following documents are to be submitted with a building permit application.

Layout of property showing the position of the SES and all related equipment.

Layout of property showing the position of the SES as it relates to neighboring properties, including screening of SES as required.

Copy of contracts with the installer and licensed master electrician. This information may be verified by the Select Board office.

Copy of Variance approval by Zoning Board of Adjustment.

Evidence that panels are anti-glare.

Manufacturer's specifications sheet for lighting if applicable.

Fees/Approval Time

Fees will be in accordance with current building permit fee schedule.

Allow two (2) weeks from time of application for approval of permit.

Ms. Mansouri asked about bond money for eventual decommissioning of the installation. She said gravel pit owners have to have bond money to decommission their pits. Mr. Colley asked about whether Planning Boards can require site plan reviews of ground-mounted residential solar

Mr. Dalessio said he would look into adding this suggestions.

Discussion of Solar Installation in the Commercial and Industrial Districts:

Definitions:

Large Solar energy Facility, Rated Nameplate Capacity, Small Solar Energy Facility.

Site Plan Review:

All solar energy facilities shall undergo site plan review by the Planning Board prior to construction, installation, or modification as provided by this section.

Required Documents

Some of the items in this category were redundant with requirements in the site plan or the Walpole Zoning Ordinance. The operation and maintenance plans were eliminated because the town has no one who does inspections. The ones that were kept are:

In addition to the submission requirements in the Planning Board's Site Plan Review Regulations, the applicant shall provide the following documents:

- Plans and drawings of the solar installation showing the proposed layout of the system must be signed and stamped by a licensed engineer.

- Proof of liability insurance

- Financial surety that satisfies decommissioning and abandonment.

Operation & Maintenance Plan

The applicant shall submit a plan for the operation and maintenance of the solar installation, which shall include measures for maintaining safe access, storm water controls and general procedures for operating and maintaining the installation.

Design Standards

Fencing: any site containing a utility-scale solar energy system shall contain elevated fencing or other devices acceptable to the Town enclosing all solar energy system components, which prevent safety hazards.

Monitoring and Maintenance

Maintenance: The operator shall maintain the facility in good condition. Maintenance shall include, but not be limited to, painting, structural repairs, and integrity of security measure. The operator shall be responsible for maintaining adequate access for emergency vehicles and maintenance equipment.

Modifications: All material modification to the facility proposed after issuance of the building permit require approval of the Planning Board.

Abandonment or Decommissioning

Removal Requirements:

Any solar installation that has reached the end of its useful life or has been abandoned shall be removed. The owner or operator shall physically remove the installation within one hundred fifty (150) days after the date of discontinues operations. The owner or operator shall notify the Planning Board by certified mail of the proposed date of discontinued operations and plans for removal.

Decommissioning: Decommissioning shall consist of:

Physical removal of the solar arrays, structures, equipment, security barriers, and electrical transmission line from the site.

Stabilization or re-vegetation of the site as necessary to minimize erosion. The Planning Board may allow the owner or operator to leave landscaping or below-grade foundations in order to minimize erosion and disruption of vegetation.

Abandonment:

Absent notice of a proposed date of decommissioning or written notice of extenuating circumstances, the solar facility shall be considered abandoned when it fails to operate for more than one year without the written consent of the Planning Board. If the owner or operator fails to remove the installation in accordance with the requirements of this section within one hundred fifty (150) days of abandonment or the proposed date of decommissioning, the Town may enter the property and remove the facility.

Application:

Utility-scale solar energy system. An applicant shall pay an initial application fee, as set by the Town, upon filing its special use permit and site plan application to cover the cost of processing and reviewing the application.

Other comments:

Mr. White referenced the possible installation at 310 Main Street. He was in favor of the project and visualized that in the future maybe a similar installation were to power all of the village. It would be better than having many owners in the village from putting installations in their yards.

Ms. Leclerc said that when her family had a solar installation for their farms it was for four buildings – three residences and a barn. The utility company would only let them install enough panels to power these buildings dependent on their previous yearly use of power.

Mr. Colley sent a link to an article about solar installations on farmland in Illinois. He said that farmers in Illinois had some of the best farmland in the country. The farmers were having a hard time making

enough money off of farming and some were turning to leasing their land for large scale solar installations. One farm was 65,000 acres.

There was discussion of the warrant article that passed last year granting owners of properties with a tax exemptions on solar installations. One person said that it added up to about a million dollars of taxable property, which would bring in about \$26,000 more in tax revenue for the town. He and some others said they didn't like subsidizing other people's property taxes. The warrant article does says the tax exemption is for property owners who consume the power on site.

Mr. Perron noted the definition in the model ordinance documents say a Large Commercial Solar Installation on page 11, such as the one planned for 310 Main Street, says: "A use of land that consists of one or more free-standing ground mounted solar collection systems with a rated nameplate capacity of between 1 MW and 5 MW that is between 5 and 25 acres in solar land coverage."

The workshop adjourned about 8:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Marilou Blaine
Secretary

cc: WPB, ZBA, Town Offices, The Walpolean.
Posted: Inside Town Offices, bulletin board outside Post Office