

NORTHFIELD CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Minutes of the Meeting on June 8, 2016

The Meeting was called to order at 6:37 pm.

I. ROLL CALL: Present were Commissioners Don Wallace, Leslie Matthews, Jane Pekol, Christine Barnes, and Russ Barrett

II. SET/ADJUST AGENDA: None.

III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED): Gary Dir of Randolph Energy Committee

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: May 11, 2016; Approved as written 4-0-1 Abstention

V. DISCUSSION

a. **Gary Dir from the Randolph Energy Committee**

Gary Dir came to speak to the NCC about Randolph's successes and challenges in community solar projects. These efforts started 2 years ago as a "Solarize" campaign with Vital Communities. Another member of the energy committee found a few potential sites. The Vermont Law School Clinic helped the committee draft an LLC agreement/business plan for the Solar Farm. (Seek out Kevin Jones or Michael Dworkin.)

The solar farm Randolph has completed is 180 kilowatts (AC) and each kilowatt is a share. Each share costs \$2500 and you can purchase as few as one share. Gary owns four shares in the solar farm, which meets his electric needs. He used to have an \$80/month electric bill, and now it is zero, making this a 10-11% return on investment. The credits come as a deduction off your electric bill. You can transfer credits if you are over-producing, but generally you don't want to buy more than you need.

Neighbors and the landowner of the site got a 5% discount on shares. A second solar farm is 90% full but organizers are waiting to see whether the "Solar Adder" gets approved. This is the system where you sell electricity to the utility for .19/kW but buy it from them for .15/kW.

There are some big advantages to community solar. It is much cheaper to invest in these co-op type systems than to get your own solar array; contractors drop the price for a larger solar install. Therefore, faster return on investment. An advantage to the utilities and all rate payers comes from not having to pay top dollar to buy in electricity during peak demands, it's being produced near-by. Randolph's community solar farm is true community solar—the credits (RECs) are not sold. One challenge for Northfield is the fact that we have 3 utilities that serve the residents.

Gary recommended Vermont Law School's Advisory Committee on climate issues for

strategies and help on our town having three different utilities that serve the area. Gary also recommended reading the energy siting bill, S.230, and adhering closely to it. Congress extended the federal 30% tax credit through 2020 with the concession that we can keep selling oil overseas.

Jane and Leslie will synthesize the information from the community solar survey done in March-April

b. Army Corp of Engineers request for Information

Army wants to begin to remediate the old firing range site, likely for lead; looking to find out about rare, threatened or endangered species. Leslie will take a look at the atlas. There is a local trout population in the Dog River above the ledges in Northfield Falls. Invasive weed remediation was discussed, as disruption of the area could exacerbate the invasive weed issue. There was a question about whether or not they will contact the surrounding neighbors to alert them.

c. Town selling of Berlin land (part of Dustin's pasture)

It was recommended that the town should pursue a right-of-way instead of selling the land, to facilitate use of the area for timber and for recreation. This will be discussed at the next Selectboard meeting.

d. Trail Grant

Russ will meet with the leaders of Vermont Youth Conservation Corps. We are on their schedule for 2017 for the bridge building work in the Town Forest.

e. Local communication around Town Forest usages

When we receive the draft Town Forest Plan from Arrowwood, NCC will make an announcement of community forums. We cannot yet commit to a timeframe. Discussed briefly some protocol on how to best communicate with the Selectboard. Further discussion has been postponed until the July meeting since we are missing 4 commissioners tonight.

f. National Trails Day Hike

We had 8 hikers total, 4 NCC and 4 other Northfield residents. The Hawk Watch area is in need of repair, and could potentially be a project for Norwich students. Porcupines have chewed a lot of the OSB plywood roof. Some solutions were discussed: use solid wood, use steel roofing, use chicken wire to deter.

g. Town Forest Updates

We expect to hear from Nathan after graduation for an update on signage. We need to make a list of possible community work days to install.

VI. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED): None.

VII. ADJOURNMENT: Meeting was adjourned at 7:52.

Respectfully submitted by Secretary Jane Pekol. These minutes are subject to changes and approval at the next regular meeting, but are substantially correct.