

MONTAGUE ENERGY COMMITTEE MINUTES
Wednesday, July 20, 2021

Present: Sally Pick, Tim Van Egmond, Ariel Elan, Pam Hanold, Jason Burbank, Chris Mason.
Guest: Bob Rueter, Walter Ramsey, Jesse Robertson (Northfield Four Star sheep farmer & agrisolar), Julian Mendoza (Greenfield Recorder).

Designate facilitator and scribe: Sally, scribe; Chris, facilitator.

Walter Ramsey, Town Planner on Solar Bylaws

Town is open to amending solar bylaws to further protect forests from solar development.

Made one change to bylaws in 2019, limiting districts allowing solar: allowed ground mounted PV by right. A bit easier to do residential ground mounted too. Carports by right. Large scale: can only clear ½ forested site for PV. Only allowed in industrial & historic industrial districts: not much space for PV in these districts.

4 arrays on town land; built between 2017-2020, permitted under old bylaws. No outstanding solar projects right now. 57 acres forest cleared for these arrays. Some mature forest also removed on landfill and burn dump for PV; total 80 acres of trees cleared. PV not allowed on agricultural land, not even if dual use, unless accessory for farm. Town owns much of industrial districts, much already developed. Eversource was required to leave forested land at a rate of 3 parts forested to 1 part PV.

Ag. Preservation Districts don't allow solar; nor do conservation restriction lands. Montague has a considerable amount of both.

Walter does not see potential for large scale PV development in forests under current bylaws.

Currently, given our bylaws, not many large tracts of privately owned forested land in Montague vulnerable to PV development, according to Walter.

Town may want to identify types of land it does not want developed, if town opens up to future large scale solar. Assess potential land use.

- Can we do dual use solar and agriculture that protects the viability of farmland?
- In case the state opens up APR land to PV in the future, Town may want to word bylaws to continue to protect agricultural land.
- Could Town allow arrays on the edge of farm fields? Walter looking for best practices for PV & agricultural use.

- Jesse mentioned that SMART program dual use requires that agricultural land continue to be used for agriculture to qualify for SMART incentives. Could require landowner putting PV in to keep land in agriculture for specified longer period of time.
 - Explained that sheep benefit from shade, especially on extremely hot days.
 - Also, PV acts as a fence of sorts helping keep out coyotes, helping keep down weeds by grazing.
 - UMass has approved grazing projects; not yet cropping systems. They approve dual use projects for agricultural SMART incentives.

- Maybe discuss ideas with Planning Committee, though they have other priorities at the moment, after MEC clarifies what it wants to ask.

Approved minutes from May 25, 2021, MEC meeting, with amendments requested by Sally.

State level energy-related policies and legislation

Sally reported about 100 for 100% project by Environment MA to gather 100 stories/audio/videos on why individuals support 100% renewable energy and the 100% Clean Act.

Environment MA also looking for Towns to ask Town Meeting to support a warrant in favor of passing the 100% Clean Act.

Energy Related Facility Updates

- Outdoor lighting upgrades to LED: Tabled.
- Petition out for adding more solar panels to Middle & High School building
 - Would need to identify if it's possible to add more PV panels.
 - Bob asked if MEC members would sign petition as individuals.

Stretch code: Tabled.

Announcements (no discussion)

- Jason has joined the Capital Improvements Committee!
 - Steve asked Jason to look into moisture control problems and mini splits for Montague Center library.

Plan agenda for next meeting: Tuesday, August 17, 2021, 4:30pm.

Other topics not reasonably anticipated 48 hours in advance of the meeting