



BCRC Regional Energy Committee Meeting Minutes

January 13, 2023

Attendees: Wayn Goodman (chair), Rob Costantino, Jeannie Jenkins, Jim Hand, Barbara True-Weber, Ellen Maloney, Bruce Lierman, Bill Christian

BCRC Staff: Bill Colvin and Callie Fishburn

Other: Jeff Nelson (VHB), Reed Wills and Marcia Haas (Suneast)

Proposed Shaftsbury Solar Project

Jeff Nelson provided an overview of the proposed 20MW fixed solar array in Shaftsbury off of Route 7 and Holy Smoke Rd.

- The array will be on approximately 85 acres of land, but the parcel the developer is in the process of buying is approximately 190 acres.
- Suneast will voluntarily comply with Bennington's solar screening ordinance.
- The array will be fenced in, and the fence perimeter will be about 350-400 feet from Route 7 but is unlikely to be visible from the road.
- Estimated 6-8 month construction cycle in the summertime, talking with VTrans about a limited access spur road off of Route 7 to mitigate traffic issues.
- VHB and Suneast have made contact with all three abutting landowners to discuss their concerns about the project.
- Estimated local tax revenue of about \$100,000 per year for the Town of Shaftsbury.
- Suneast will provide decommissioning security and is committed to using native ground cover.
- VHB reviewed BCRC's Regional Energy Plan and did an analysis of several gravel pits in Shaftsbury as potential alternative sites. It was determined that the gravel pits were too small and too far from transmission lines.

Questions from the Committee to VHB/Suneast:

- Wayn Goodman: Would the company be willing to move the project further away from the road and abutting properties?
 - Jeff Nelson responded that there is some room to shift the array, but its limited by topographic constraints.
- General question: How likely is VTrans to approve the spur road off of Route 7?
 - Jeff Nelson: it's not a sure thing. They have had several meetings with VTrans and are still waiting on approval. VTrans would likely need to develop a transportation management plan for the road. They did approve a spur road in the past for a project in the Northeast Kingdom.

General Committee Discussion:

- Callie Fishburn provided an overview of relevant sections of the Regional Plan and Regional Energy Plan.

1. The energy plan establishes a goal for Bennington County to add 85MW of new solar capacity by 2050.
 2. The recommended goal for Shaftsbury is 10.5MW of new solar capacity by 2050 (if this project were build as planned, it would nearly double that goal).
 3. Possible constraints on the project as identified in the Regional Energy Plan are the presence of prime agricultural soils, and wildlife habitats such as Deer Wintering Areas (DWAs).
- Bruce Lierman asked about compliance with the Shaftsbury Town Plan
 1. Callie Fishburn responded that Shaftsbury does not have an enhanced Act 174-compliant energy chapter. The energy section of the town plan generally encourages renewable energy development. Because Shaftsbury does not have an enhanced energy plan, it will receive “due consideration” by the Public Utility Commission when reviewing the project, as opposed to the “substantial deference” it would receive if it had an enhanced energy chapter.
 - Ellen Maloney asked if this committee has any power to affect the outcome of the project.
 1. Callie Fishburn: Directly, no, but BCRC has standing in Section 248 proceedings convened by the PUC. The BCRC can submit testimony regarding how a project does or does not comply with the Regional Plan/Energy Plan, and that testimony will be informed by input from the Regional Energy Committee. The perspectives and knowledge of the committee is greatly valued when reviewing these types of projects and determining their benefit to the region.
 - There was general consensus among committee members that it is still too soon to determine if they are in favor of the project or not. There are some obvious benefits of the proposed project, but still several questions and concerns that need to be addressed. The developer offering decommissioning security was seen as a positive by the committee, as well as the minimal transmission and distribution infrastructure that would need to be constructed. Jim Hand pointed out that because there would be no building construction, the project would actually protect agricultural land more than other development. It was agreed that if the project were to go forward, the committee would be in favor of the limited access road. Ellen Maloney added that if this project were done appropriately, it could serve as a model in the region and encourage other larger solar projects to be developed.
 - **Follow-up questions for VHB/Suneast (Callie will follow up with Jeff Nelson)**
 1. Have wildlife studies been conducted to determine if important habitats/migration corridors are present in the project area?
 2. Has an offset purchase option been considered?
 3. The committee would like to hear the results of the landowner conversations once available.
 4. What is the exact proposed acreage of tree clearing to take place?
 5. What considerations have been made for primary agricultural land?
 6. The committee would like to see a concept model of what the landowner views will look like post-construction.

Other Business:

Jim Sullivan has agreed to join the Regional Energy Committee.

The meeting adjourned at 5:55PM.