



Village of Manchester, Vermont

Minutes of the Public Hearing of the Planning Commission Held August 17th, 2022 at 11:00am

Members Present: Chair Audrey Kolloff, Vice-Chair Rich Heilemann, Anthony MacLaurin, Christie Bronstein, Renee Waller, Tom Scarnecchia

Member(s) Absent: Eric Dorsch

Others Present: Zoning Administrative Officer Curan VanDerWielen, Treasurer Donald Brodie, Cat Bryars, Jim Sullivan, Martha Heilemann, Kim Weiss-Lewit

The meeting was held both in person at the Village Office and via zoom.

Chair Audrey Kolloff called the meeting to order at 11:04am.

Planned Business:

Review of Proposed Changes Made to the Plan of Development

Kolloff indicated that she would begin by making presentation of information relevant to the Energy Chapter of the Plan of Development. Scarnecchia asked VanDerWielen if the presentation could be enlarged to full screen, to which VanDerWielen responded that it could not be made full screen due to it being a PDF and not a PowerPoint Presentation. Kolloff asked the Commissioners if the screen needed to be zoomed out, to which Rich Heilemann responded that everyone could read the screen clearly.

Kolloff began her presentation by introducing the Village 9050 Plan to bring energy consumption to 90% renewable in the Village of Manchester by 2050 and then stated that there were hard copies of the presentation available to members of the public. Kolloff continued, stating that the graphics available on the presentation were provided thanks to the late Lu French, before reiterating the goals of the Village 9050 Plan and describing how the transition towards greater renewable energy use was an ongoing and historically contextualized conversation. Kolloff also mentioned that Cat Bryars, a specialist from the BCRC, was present and had helped identify key areas and items for improvement under the 9050 Plan as part of the Energy Chapter drafting process. Kolloff continued, stating that the goals of the 9050 Plan were engrained in the Energy Chapter, indicating that recent applications made to the Public Utility Commission (PUC) regarding solar panel installations had been granted without the input of the municipality, as the Village has no voice in such proceedings until an Energy Plan is adopted in the Village's Plan of Development. With this addition, Kolloff stated, the Village would now be able to participate in the process moving forward.

Kolloff then discussed how the Energy Chapter would align the Village's Plan of Development with state goals towards expanding biofuel and renewable electricity use by 2050, adding that the

Village was working with Efficiency Vermont and other groups to assist with this process. Kolloff then read three excerpts from the Plan of Development out loud to demonstrate how the Energy Chapter achieves this. Kolloff commented that the Plan of Development would continue to operate as a guiding document for both municipal planning and zoning. Kolloff then stated that the Energy Chapter had been designed to balance both the need to transition energy usage while preserving the historic design characteristics of structures within the Village. Kolloff commented that she believes the plan, as crafted, accomplished such a balance. Kolloff then proceeded to read three additional excerpts from the Plan of Development to describe how the Plan and Zoning Bylaws interacted to preserve the historical development patterns of the Village while still encouraging the installation of solar panels and other renewable energy sources so as to meet the 9050 Plan goals. Kolloff then displayed several images of types of solar installation footings, describing how the classification of each installation would differ depending on how and where the panels were installed. These included ground-mounted panels, rooftop-mounted panels, different forms of ground-based screening, and preferred rooftop placement behind rooflines or on select non-character defining roofs of buildings. Kolloff then pointed to reference images for each type of panel mounting, indicating both the logic behind and differences between each preferred placement.

Kolloff continued, then displaying and discussing a map depicting preferred sites for solar panel placement based both on district and potential solar resourcing. Kolloff walked the Commission and public through any stipulations regarding placement in individual design review sub-districts, beginning with the most restrictive regulations under the Historic Core, then discussing the 300ft from the center of the road restriction on development in the Preservation Overlay, and finally indicating that the rest of the Village sits within the most flexible General Review sub-district. Kolloff then indicated the preferred sites in each district in relation to the map displayed, discussing further how placement could be impacted by potential solar resource capacity and mentioning a prohibition on placement in all wetlands. Kolloff also showed sites already committed to solar energy generation and the best sites for solar development.

Kolloff continued, stating that the reason for why the proposed Energy Plan focused so acutely on solar energy was because most of the Village was unsuitable for wind energy generation facilities. Kolloff added that in reference to both the Commission and BCRC's assessments, small contributions to the 9050 Plan would 'stack up' over time to help achieve it. These might include small residential or limited commercial contributions across many properties, rather than one or more large, industrial-scale installations. Kolloff then stated the presence of 325 acres of usable land highlights the potential present in the Village, adding that additional benefits for homeowners would be available in the form of reimbursements in the form of tax credit, depending on the nature of the installation. Kolloff reiterated that the presentation she had given was designed largely to introduce the fundamental mission and goals of the Energy Plan, and that a full version of the plan was available to the public.

Heilemann then asked if there were any questions from the public. Kim Weiss-Lewit asked whether funding were available to homeowners interested in installing solar facilities, or if any other form of financial assistance were available at the state or county levels. Heilemann stated

that the answer to that question appeared to be a moving picture as multiple benefits were still being discussed at the Federal level. Heilemann then commented that Jim Hand might be able to offer a better response. Hand stated that for residential installations no Vermont or Federal financial support had been created yet, although a Federal tax credit was created in 2022 at 26%, adding that it would soon go to 30% in 2023. Anthony MacLaurin asked a question as to how the tax credit works. Hand cautioned not to mix ‘apples with oranges’, stating that credits on heat pumps were taken care of through Efficiency Vermont while solar tax credits were a Federal affair. Bryars added that if a homeowner exceeded their tax credit allotment in a year, then those excess credits could be pulled later, although there was probably a timeline limit to such an action. Hand commented that it was five years through 2022. Weiss-Lewit commented that she found the explanation helpful, adding that she believed the biggest barrier to many homeowners were cost before suggesting that the information provided to her in the meeting might be added to the Village’s website to assist homeowners.

Tom Scarnecchia then stated that he had a question about the example given by Hand about encouraging residential solar installations. Specifically, Scarnecchia asked how the Plan of Development would apply to commercial or industrial installations, asking additionally if the Plan covered such installations at all. Heilemann stated that all projects on preferred sites would have to go to PUC during which the municipality would have the ability to contribute stipulations based on the Energy Plan. Hand commented that he did not hear the first part of Scarnecchia’s question, but that if it pertained to whether a proposed project would go to the PUC, then yes, it would. Heilemann then stated that just because a site was marked preferred, it was not necessarily available for industrialized development. Hand then commented that just because a site was marked preferred, it did not guarantee success. Bryars then stated that policies adopted in the plan could not ban outright commercial or industrial solar facilities, but that she remembered the Commission had considered limiting the potential size of installations, although she couldn’t remember if it was in the finalized plan. Kolloff stated that a restriction on the size of installations was not included in the final draft. Kolloff added that after a lengthy discussion, it was decided that regulating solar screening would be a more effective means for the Village than outright regulations size, which was handled on Page 69 of the updated Plan. MacLaurin commented that there would also be limitations inherent in large solar installations insofar as they would have to install the correct utility poles. Kolloff then commented that on the preferred solar sites in the slide deck, the purple lines depicted appropriate distribution lines and that connections over 10ft. would increase the cost of projects. Hand stated that it was indeed a short distance and that Green Mountain Power (GMP) had had too many accessibility problems with lines not along roads, and thus would no longer be installing lines along pre-existing roads. Kolloff then addressed Scarnecchia directly, stating that the Commission had already discussed a prohibition of industrial scale facilities, but that there was not enough open acreage for such a site and thus was an unneeded regulation. Kolloff then asked Scarnecchia if he had any thoughts on the matter.

Scarnecchia then stated that his concerns were about open agricultural lands which could specifically be targeted for large-scale solar development, of which a number of parcels fell into such a category. Scarnecchia continued, stating that in terms of preserving the character of the Village, he felt it was not always easy to screen developments. Scarnecchia then asked what this

might mean for neighbors. Hand then asked whether Scarnecchia's concern was focused on residents or open lands. Heilemann then stated that part of the Commission's obligation is to protect the style of the Village but also to meet its energy goals, meaning that developments could not be relegated to entirely rooftop installations, that the existing language of the Plan would offer the Village flexible regulatory options, and that it would likely be impossible to satisfy every neighborhood with a Village-wide policy. MacLaurin then stated that trying to find the right balance between the preservation of character and meeting the 9050 goals was paramount, adding that it was unlikely that any plan would satisfy everyone. Scarnecchia stated that he understood. Kolloff added that she was unsure if Scarnecchia had had a chance to view the solar screening ordinance. Scarnecchia commented that he would be happy to review it offline, unless the audience wished to view it. Kolloff stated that it had already been approved by the Board of Trustees, but was waiting for a public hearing, hopefully during their next regular meeting. Kolloff then asked MacLaurin if both could be handled in the same Board meeting. MacLaurin then stated that he could help facilitate it. Kolloff asked if the conversation had addressed Scarnecchia's concern. Several attendees attempted to speak simultaneously. Scarnecchia then began to state that his concern had been more of a question before Kolloff stated the Plan was very specific regarding where commercial and industrial sites could be located. Hand then stated that for large, especially ground-mounted projects were largely confined to be between roads before offering an anecdote on an agricultural solar installation and its benefits in terms of agricultural development. Bryars added that at present, agriculture could be a somewhat economically challenging occupation and that solar installations could help offset costs for farms and provide additional revenue for businesses in struggling sectors.

Heilemann asked whether there were any further questions. After a moment passed, Heilemann stated that it appeared everyone seemed to be satisfied. Kolloff began to state that she believed the hearing was thus complete until Heilemann stated that there were additional edits made regarding Act 171, which concerned forest blocks and corridors but did not impact the Village Plan too intensely. Scarnecchia commented that it appeared much of the forest blocks were prime solar development land. Kolloff clarified that the marked preferred sites were highlighted as feasible project sites, not necessarily encouraged siting, adding that the intention was not to cut down forests in the name of solar energy generation. To meet the 9050 Goal, Kolloff stated, most development would probably have to be residential in nature. Weiss-Lewit commented that maybe if commercially generated energy came back into the Village then it could be expanded and goals could be more easily met. Heilemann commented that it already would as the power would be fed into the grid, but that this would be allocated by GMP not locally. Scarnecchia then asked why highlighted properties on the map which already were set to contribute did not contribute to the 9050 Goal. Heilemann agreed with Scarnecchia, that they should be added as a lot of marked preferable sites would not practically be workable as it did not make sense to expand or create new solar facilities on golf courses or in conflict with zoning regulations. Bryars added that pages 60-69 covered prohibited areas and created an explicit policy prohibiting certain siting.

Heilemann asked again whether there were any further questions. Weiss-Lewit commented that while the Plan had been primarily focused on solar energy, she was glad that transportation had been addressed in the Plan too as she wanted to see the Village become more pedestrian and

bicycle friendly. Heilemann stated that he had spoken about the same issue with Weiss-Lewit during the last meeting and that it she had been helpful. Weiss-Lewit stated that if she was told how to be helpful and how to help then she would. Heilemann then stated that it appeared in terms of the meeting, the Commission was all set. Kolloff asked Bryars about the next procedural items for the Plan. Bryars stated that they were close, but that the Board of Trustees needed to provide one more public hearing and the BCRC had to approve the Plan.

The meeting was almost adjourned before Heilemann motioned to vote to approve the Plan and submit it to the Board of Trustees for their public hearing. Renee Waller seconded the motion. The motion was then passed unanimously by the Commission.

There being no further business before the Commission, Maclaurin motioned to adjourn with Heilemann seconding. The Commission then voted unanimously to adjourn at 11:50am.

The next regular meeting of the Planning Commission will be held on September 21st, 2022, at 11:00am.

Respectfully Submitted,
Curan VanDerWielen, Zoning Administrative Officer