

CONWAY PLANNING BOARD

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Work Session – Solar Collection Systems

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A work session of the Conway Planning Board was held on Thursday, May 9, 2019 beginning at 6:05 pm at the Conway Town Office in Center Conway, NH. Those present were: Chair, Steven Hartmann; Selectmen's Representative, Steven Porter; Secretary, Steven Steiner; Bill Barbin; Planning Director, Thomas Irving; and Executive Secretary, Krista Day.

WORK SESSION – SOLAR COLLECTION SYSTEMS

Mitchell Clayton of Solar Conserves and Michael DiGregorio appeared before the Board.

Mr. Irving explained that this workshop is an opportunity for the Board to be familiar with regulations and potential issues of solar collection systems. The Planning Board is giving consideration to potential zoning ordinances relating to solar gardens in the residential agriculture area.

Mr. Clayton explained that many Town ordinances are silent when it comes to large scale solar systems and this often creates contention around the issue.

Mr. Clayton stated that the overall benefit of solar gardens is the fact that once they are built, there are really no additional costs as the fuel costs are free. This can also help to lower the wholesale price for the market.

Mr. Irving clarified for Mr. Steiner that installation of solar panels on residential homes are already addressed in the town ordinances. He explained that the primary focus right now is on the larger systems that they do not currently have provisions for, particularly in the residential agricultural areas.

Mr. Irving read some definitions regarding the different terms in relation to solar gardens.

Mr. Clayton explained that if a community is concerned about really large solar systems, long term goals of the municipality should be created and determinations should be made regarding where these types of systems can and cannot go.

Mike DiGregorio explained that none of the projects he is currently working on would be able to be seen from any roads. He stated that they would each take up about a 30 acre area.

Mr. DiGregorio stated that he would hate to see these types of projects go in the commercial or industrial areas as they would prohibit businesses from using those areas in the future.

Mr. DiGregorio explained that the average contract for these systems is 25 years. Decisions can then be made to continue the projects or return the area to its natural state. He noted that this is a

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positive as all parts can be easily removed compared to large buildings where foundations are somewhat permanent.

Mr. Irving summarized this as saying it is not a destructive use of the land.

Mr. DiGregorio noted that he is looking into the possibility of combining these projects with something called ‘bee pastures’ that has been potentially identified to increasing production at nearby farms.

Mr. Porter stated that there are areas around town that have large amounts of undeveloped land that would not be affordable to manufacture new homesites.

Mr. DiGregorio noted that land that slopes slightly to the south is the most optimal.

Mr. Hartmann stated that there is no denying that Conway has an abundance of land and it is not the goal to decimate the area.

There was discussion regarding the issue that New Hampshire does not have a host capacity map that would allow them to see what areas of town have sufficient capacity and what areas would need utility improvements in order to install these systems.

Mr. Irving stated that because they do not know what improvements are necessary before they receive an application, they need to come up with an approval process to mitigate the risk.

Mr. Clayton stated that well-crafted ordinances can address those concerns.

There was brief discussion regarding the minimal impact on the areas natural state when systems are installed.

Mr. DiGregorio explained that in all contracts there are insurance bonds in place to ensure that everything is removed and the area is returned to its natural state.

Mr. Hartmann stated that they would take all the information they heard today and schedule a time for another meeting or work session.

Mr. Irving stated that the objective would be to have something for the public to vote on for the next town meeting. The next steps would be to have a draft ready by the end of September, the Board would review it in December, and a public hearing in January.

At 6:54 pm, Mr. Barbin moved, seconded by Mr. Steiner, to adjourn the meeting. The motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Krista Day, Executive Secretary