

FARMINGTON PLANNING BOARD

153 Farmington Falls Road

August 14, 2023 – 6:00 p.m.

Minutes

Planning Board members present: Judith Murphy, Mike Otley, Lloyd Smith, Craig Jordan, Clayton King, Gloria McGraw, and Jeff Wright.

Alternate members present: Michael Guerrette.

Members unable to attend: Michael Macneil.

Others present: Code Enforcement Officer, Steve Kaiser; Code Assistant, Kate Foster; applicant: Shane McDougall of Aviest Engineering representing AE Farmington Falls, LLC.

Ms. Murphy opened the meeting at 6:00 p.m.

1. Pledge of Allegiance

2. Designate alternate members, if needed

No designation needed.

3. Review minutes of July 10, 2023

Mr. King made a motion to approve the minutes of July 10, 2023 as written.

Mr. Otley seconded the motion.

VOTE: 7 – Affirmative

Motion carried.

Mr. Smith stated that at the last meeting the Board tabled Stephen Hopkins' application for 11 apartments, and since the Code Office has not heard from him he would like to have the Board take action and remove it from the table.

Mr. Kaiser stated that Mr. Hopkins would have to pay the application fee again if he had to refile.

Mr. Smith made a motion to remove the application.

There being no second, the motion died and Mr. Hopkins' application remains tabled.

4. 23-SE-02, 23-SR-12, 23-SS-09

AE Farmington Falls, LLC

Farmington Falls Road / R01-23-D

Construct a 995KW (AC) Solar Facility

Ms. Murphy introduced the applications, verified the applicant was present, and asked the Board if they would like to review the applications together or individually.

Mr. King made a motion to accept the Site Review, Soil Erosion/Storm Water, and Solar Energy applications as complete and to review them together.

Mr. Otley seconded the motion.

VOTE: 7 – Affirmative

Motion carried.

Shane McDougall of Aviest Engineering introduced himself and gave an overview of the project, stating that the site is at approximately 980 Farmington Falls Road and that it is currently mostly field. He said the project will be just under 1MW, have arrays mounted on posts, buffer trees will be planted, a standard gravel access road installed, and be fenced with a gate and KNOX box.

Mr. Wright stated the application was put together very well.

Mrs. McGraw asked where the power goes.

Mr. McDougall said the general answer given is that it goes where it's needed.

Mr. Kaiser added that as other solar companies have all previously stated, electrons go into the grid and follow the path of least resistance – wherever the demand is.

Mr. Guerrette asked if CMP can handle the impact of all the solar arrays and that there are rumors of a pause.

Mr. McDougall replied that he hasn't heard of any issues, only cluster studies and a pause for the bigger 5MW and higher solar arrays but this does not affect the smaller ones like this one.

Mr. Guerrette asked if there is a risk of constructing the solar projects right now.

Mr. McDougall replied no, not that he was aware of.

Mr. King verified with Mr. McDougall that there will be four CMP poles. He stated he doesn't feel the costs for the decommissioning bond is realistic.

Mr. McDougall stated that DEP has to approve the decommissioning bond.

Mr. Jordan said it shows the snowmobile trail being deleted, and asked if there is a way to work with them to preserve the trail.

Mr. McDougall replied that he will address the issue and in other projects he has worked on, they have been able to work with the snowmobile clubs to make sure the trails are not shut off - just moved if necessary.

Mr. Jordan asked why they are not connecting directly to CMP where the lines go right through the property.

Mr. McDougall replied that those lines are too high voltage to connect to the project directly.

Mr. Jordan stated the plans say it will be surrounded by a buffer of trees and asked if it was going to be just seedlings or actual trees.

Mr. McDougall replied that they will be 6' - what the ordinance requires - and will be maintained.

Ms. Murphy and Mr. Smith added that it is important to have the correct type of trees as well.

Mr. McDougall stated the developer will have the property maintained year-round.

Mr. Smith asked where on the property the panels will start.

Mr. McDougall replied they will start at the rise of the field.

Mr. Smith asked if the project included a culvert under Route 2 – adding that it was put in in the 1950's for a cattle crossing.

Mr. McDougall replied that the culvert is not included as far as he is aware.

There was a short discussion on the amount of heat that solar panels emit and how the manufacturers are working on self-cooling panels.

Mr. Guerrette said he has the same concerns as Mr. King and Mr. Jordan about the decommissioning bond and the trees and asked if there is anything the Board can do to make sure these concerns are addressed.

Mr. Kaiser stated the Board can always add conditions to their approval. He said that the per acre decommissioning costs for this project are similar to other solar projects in town, and NextEra had to replant until their buffer trees were established.

Mr. McDougall added that it is hard to know exactly what decommissioning costs will be in 20-30 years, but regardless of cost it is required to be done and DEP requires bonds to be reevaluated every five years.

Ms. Murphy asked if they would be willing to come back with updates during the project.

Mr. McDougall stated they can do that if asked, if that is what they have been having the other solar companies do.

Mr. Kaiser stated the other companies have come back multiple times because there were changes to the plans, and if this project is changed in any way they will have to come back for a modification of the approved plans by the Board.

Mrs. McGraw added that the Board assumes that what is approved, is what is going to be followed along with the ordinance requirements and the Board also relies on Mr. Kaiser to follow-up with them as well. She said this is a small town and if there are any concerns, it will

get back to them as a Board or Mr. Kaiser.

Mr. Kaiser said there is good oversight by DEP as well and their field reps are glad to advise on any issues if needed.

Ms. Murphy asked about the cluster studies being done through CMP.

Mr. McDougall said this has stalled the 5MW projects only which we are way under at 1MW.

Mr. Smith verified with Mr. McDougall that he had received the comments from the Fire Rescue Department and Public Works Department and those will be addressed.

Mr. Wright made a motion to approve the Site Review, Soil Erosion/Storm Water, and Solar Energy applications as presented.

Mr. King seconded the motion.

VOTE: 7 – Affirmative

Motion carried.

5. Other Business

Code Office:

- Working with DECD and Riverside Greenhouse on a CDBG grant for an expansion. The owner will be coming before the Board with a Site Review and Soil Erosion/Storm Water application this fall.
- There will be a Public Hearing at the September meeting for changes to the performance standards in the Zoning Ordinance regarding solar projects.
- There were three CEO approvals granted since the last Planning Board meeting: Brenda Simoneau moved her alpaca store from 998 Farmington Falls Road to 1030 Farmington Falls Road; WMCA was approved for a change of use and converted the building at 105 Mt. Blue Circle owned by FMH back into a Childcare Center; and UMF was approved for a 432 SF addition to the existing chip boiler room on Perkins Street.

Mr. Smith asked if Avesta Housing has come back in with the updated agreement that had expired.

Mr. Kaiser replied that both property owners have been to the Code Office and said they are working on it, and as soon as it is finalized, a copy will be forwarded to the Board.

Mr. Smith asked if there were any repercussions if they didn't get it back in a timely manner.

Mr. Kaiser replied that the owners have to finalize and update the purchase and sales agreement as required by the project. He said construction won't be until next year so there is ample time to complete this document.

Mr. Smith verified with Mr. Kaiser that when there is a CEO review, the applicant pays the same filing fee and reimburses the Town for the certified abutter notification.

There being no further business or discussion, Ms. Murphy called for a motion to adjourn.

Mr. King made a motion to adjourn the meeting.
Mr. Otley seconded the motion.

VOTE: 7 – Affirmative
Motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:48 p.m.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Kate Foster.

Planning Board

Date