

**CITY OF VERGENNES
PLANNING COMMISSION
MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2016**

Members Present: Shannon Haggett-Chair, Mike Winslow-Vice Chair, Jason Farrell, Cheryl Brinkman, John Coburn

Members Absent: Tim Cook, Morgan Kittredge (on an approved leave of absence)

Also Present: Mel Hawley, Zoning Administrator; Greg White, Green Mountain Power

Shannon called the regular meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. He asked if there were any amendments to the agenda. No amendments to the agenda were brought forth.

Shannon introduced Greg White from Green Mountain Power (GMP). As part of the Planning Commission's update of the Municipal Development Plan, they asked Mr. White to attend the meeting to present information from GMP regarding the realities of alternative energy proliferation in the Vergennes area for the immediate future, as well as over the next 10-20 years.

Mr. White explained that northern Addison County has been one of the earliest adopters and most prolific areas in the state for solar projects. He outlined the interconnection process for solar and wind projects and how the three electric distribution substations serving the area are nearing capacity for new power generation. He demonstrated an interactive map accessed on GMP's web-site that allows users to view existing wind and solar projects, system capacity and line capacity. The map also shows the number of projects in process that are not yet interconnected. Mr. White added that GMP is working on enhancements to the mapping software to include topographic information and other natural features such as wetlands. These enhancements could make the map a very useful tool in identifying the most appropriate locations for future alternative energy projects.

Mr. White then discussed how GMP is working to expand alternative energy projects in the state and are testing energy storage devices such as Tesla batteries to help control the energy load – both in generation and in use. Their goal is to make Vermont less dependent on the Independent Operator System (ISO) and more energy independent which will have both economic and social benefits. He explained that GMP is very willing to work with municipalities to develop best practices for project siting. Everyone agreed that Vergennes would be an ideal candidate for such a relationship given its relatively small geographic area. Mike asked if GMP expected the current status of nearing load capacity for the area to continue, or if there would be additional generation capacity within the next five years. Mr. White said that it was probable that capacity would increase.

Mr. White offered to return for the April meeting with additional information and enhanced maps to help the Planning Commission identify the most appropriate locations within the city for alternative energy projects. Everyone agreed this would be beneficial.

The minutes to the regular meeting of January 22, 2016 were reviewed. Cheryl moved to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded by John with all voting in favor.

The Planning Commission next began to discuss items that should be considered as updates to the Municipal Development Plan.

- 1) Incorporation of a solar siting entry: The group discussed Mr. White's presentation and Shannon suggested this would be an area where receiving public input would be helpful to the process. He suggested this might be a topic for a public survey. John volunteered to draft a survey for the next meeting. Cheryl volunteered to take the two solar siting draft entries presented at January's meeting and synthesize them. The updated entry will be presented at March's meeting. Mike asked if it might make sense to create a green energy overlay district similar to the existing Archeological Overlay and Flood Hazard Overlay Districts. Everyone agreed this should be examined further once we have Green Mountain Power's enhanced maps.
- 2) Updated language for materials management entry: Cheryl presented an updated entry that had been edited by Theresa Kuczynski, Executive Director of the Adison County Solid Waste Management District. Cheryl also presented an update of that entry. She wanted to present both entries to have the group choose. Everyone preferred the easier to read final draft that Cheryl presented.
- 3) Developing a plan for public outreach: John volunteered to draft a fact and feeling finding survey for solar siting. He asked Mel if a database of email addresses of city residents exists. Mel responded that there isn't such a database. Jason noted that former Planning Commission Chair, Neil Curtis, had compiled one and that he would contact Mr. Curtis to see if it was accessible. He also noted that it might not be up to date and so the utility of it may be minimal. John asked if there could be any way to alert residents of the planned surveys and to possibly collect email addresses. Mel mentioned posting on Front Porch Forum and having a sign in sheet at Thursday night's public forum. Shannon asked if it would be possible to make a brief announcement at the City's Annual Meeting on February 29, 2016. Mel responded that this would be possible.
- 4) Incorporation of recommendations from the Strong Communities, Better Connections (SCBC) program: Shannon reminded everyone that a public forum to review recommendations from the draft report was scheduled for Thursday, February 25th and he encouraged everyone to attend.

Transportation items update – No update.

Education items update – No update.

Stormwater items update – Mike reported that the grant process for this year’s stormwater projects would be open soon and he would have more to report at a later meeting.

Tree/Urban Forestry items update – No update.

Materials Management items update – No update.

No new business was brought forward.

The meeting adjourned at 8:52 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Mel Hawley, Clerk