

PLANNING BOARD

WORKSHOP MINUTES

Nov. 2, 2023

Middleton Old Town Hall

200 King's Highway

Middleton, N.H 03887

Call to Order: Janet Kalar called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance

Roll Call: Janet Kalar (Chair), John Mullen (Vice Chair), John Quinn (SLVD rep.), Roxanne Tufts-Keegan (BOS rep.), Ken Kalar (alt.), Christine Maynard (alt.).

Opening Remarks: None.

Old Business:

Subject: Draft Solar Ordinance

Discussion: J. Kalar said she reviewed the Ordinances from Rochester, Durham and Pelham, but liked the thorough definitions found in Pelham's version. She added the details would answer potential questions from residents.

J. Mullen said he used those ordinances, which are based on state regulations, to create the draft for Middleton. He added the board discussed changes in September, but he would add more definitions for the board to consider at the meeting scheduled Nov. 9.

J. Mullen said there is no limit to the number of solar farms in town, as long as it complies with local zoning Ordinances. He added projects must comply with storm water regulations to address run off water.

The board agreed all projects must maintain the rural character of the community. Property owners can use their land as they see, as long as it complies with local and state regulations.

J. Mullen said he just attended a forum about drafting solar Ordinances. It was hosted by Strafford Regional Planning Commission (SRPC) and included participants from Somersworth, Lee and the state.

He said SRPC is still learning about solar panel ordinances while state officials need to update existing regulations to be more responsive. He added state solar regulations should be thorough, like wind ordinances.

J. Mullen said Somersworth is using the solar ordinance from Keene as a base for its own. He added Keene, which is a city with a college, is "green" as the streetlights and other systems are solar powered.

While Somersworth officials are still working on the ordinance, J. Mullen said he would attempt to obtain a copy after it becomes available.

There were concerns about whether police, firefighters and emergency personnel in the area are trained to respond to a home, business or area with solar panels. Other communities may have addressed the issue to allow emergency responders to safely shut off, operate around or handle fires or other issues, according to J. Mullen.

R. Tufts-Keegan said the ordinance must include height requirements for solar panels.

J. Mullen said it should be based on zoning Ordinances. He added it would be 24 feet in the Sunrise Lake Village District and 35 feet in the rest of the town.

J. Mullen said the ordinance should also designate areas for permitted uses of solar panels on Municipal property, including around the Municipal offices, the fire department, Old Town Hall, the highway department and the gravel pit. He added the school should also be allowed for District use, if needed.

J. Mullen said he will check to see if there are any requirements for fences around solar farms and what height it should be.

R. Tufts-Keegan said the ordinance should encourage property owners to use animal friendly fences.

Once completed, J. Mullen said he would send a copy of the ordinance to SRPC for review. He added they do not provide legal counsel.

C. Maynard said Pelham's ordinance is new and they others used are recent.

J. Mullen said he would check to see how the ordinance from other communities have worked and whether there are specific issues or successes. He added Milton issued 12 to 15 solar permits and have not seen any issues.

J. Mullen said there is still time to finalize the draft before it needs to be submitted to the town for residents to consider it next March. He added it can also be amended in the future.

New Business: Site Visits.

Discussion: J. Mullen suggested the Planning Board visit properties being discussed, especially when multiple issues were identified or concerns were raised. He added Access Road could be one of the potential locations to visit to allow members to better understand the details.

R. Tufts-Keegan said Pond Road and Moose Mountain Road should be visited too.

R. Tufts-Keegan said repairs to Class VI roads must be coordinated through the Select Board beforehand. She added firefighters, police and ambulance crews need to access these areas.

Adjournment: The meeting ended at 7:51 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, J. Quinn.