



City of Woonsocket, RI

Design Review Commission Meeting Minutes

Date/Time: Tue, May 12, 2020 | 6 PM

Location: Online Meeting via Zoom, Meeting ID 917-8310-1834

I. Call to Order

Chairman Finlay called the meeting to order at 6:12PM (delayed due to technical issues)

II. Attendance Review

Members in Attendance:

1. Ken Finlay, Chairman
2. Roji Eappen, Vice-Chairman
3. Ron Miller, Secretary
4. Wendall Gardner
5. Jon Pratt

Others in Attendance:

1. Kevin Proft, River Corridor Review Officer
2. Theresa Dunigan, Recording Secretary
3. Scott Gibbs, President, Economic Development Foundation of Rhode Island
4. Brad Ward, Building Official
5. Carl Johnson, Zoning Official
6. John Typadis, Applicant, Mendon Road Solar LLC
7. Sevag Khatchadourian, Applicant, Mendon Road Solar LLC
8. Jennifer Cervenka, Counsel for Applicant, Cervenka Green & Ducharme
9. Stacy Thomson, Cervenka Green & Ducharme
10. Jason Gold, Project Engineer, ESS Group
11. _____ Beauchamp, Owner

III. Old Business

None.

IV. New Business

Prior to beginning New Business, Chairman Ken Finlay read remote meeting proceeding guidelines to explain how members of the public would be able to participate in the public hearing portion of the meeting (wait until the Chair opens the floor to comment and then announce full name and address for the record).

Motion to continue items from May 12 agenda to June 2 agenda if interrupted by technical difficulties: Secretary Miller

Second: Member Gardner

Discussion: None.

Vote:

Chairman Finlay	Yes
Vice-Chairman Eappen	Yes
Secretary Miller	Yes
Member Gardner	Yes
Member Pratt	Yes

Motion Passed 5-0-0

- a. Application: Mendon Road Solar | Owner: Keith and Wayne Beauchamp
Applicant: Mendon Road Solar, LLC | Project Location: 0 Mendon Road, Lot 50-4
The application has proposed a 0.995+/- MW ground-mounted solar array in an I-1 (light industrial) district, The Design Review Commission will review and vote on the application.

Jennifer Cervenka, counsel for and representing Mendon Road Solar LLC, greeted the Commission and explained the proposed project, a large ground-mounted commercial solar energy system on a 6-acre vacant and previously disturbed parcel at 0 Mendon Road. The entrance will be located at a previously existing driveway on Park East Drive. This type of use is allowed by Special Use Permit from the Zoning Board in MU-2, Mixed-Use Industrial/Commercial zones and requires design review approval from this commission. In addition, approval from the City Council is required for a new utility pole within the Park East Drive right-of-way. The current design does require a variance from the Zoning Board for the height of the security fence, lowering the fence from the required 9' to 7'. This proposed height is the minimum required by the State electric code.

Solar use is a passive land use, requiring minimal traffic after construction is completed. There will be no burden on municipal services. There is no noise impact, generation of waste, or negative environmental impacts. Mendon Road Solar, LLC is submitting paperwork to RIDEM for a RIPDES permit, and an environmental review will be conducted during that process. The proposed project is also consistent with surrounding building uses. All required setbacks will be met, and there will be a 20' vegetative buffers surrounding the project.

Mendon Road Solar LLC has reviewed the Staff Report and agrees with all the conditions of approval listed in the Staff Report except for #6 (pertaining to hours limiting construction). Mendon Road Solar LLC proposed having no construction from 9 PM-7 AM on weekdays and 5 PM on Saturday through 7 AM on Monday for the weekends. These hours match times specified in the Woonsocket Sound Ordinance.

Vice-Chairman Roji Eappen stated he did not foresee much of a noise impact to the neighboring residences due to the location, but he was more concerned with the traffic impact created by the construction for the Highland Industrial Park area, an area already experiencing large amounts of traffic during daily rush hours. Mendon Road Solar, LLC stated it would be amenable to hours suggested by the Commission. Building Official Mr.

Brad Ward said the installation for the ground-mounted panels is post-driven and will therefore create a lot of noise. He recommends construction ending by 6 PM based on complaints received for previous projects. Member Wendall Gardner commented his experience has been that the louder, pole-driven work is often scheduled for earlier in the day to help minimize complaints. In addition, he suggested time limitations on when specific machinery is usable. Member Gardner suggested this as a potential solution to allow the later hour while also avoiding noise disturbance for residential neighbors. Ms. Cervenka responded the developers will do whatever is requested by the Commission to minimize the noise impact.

Next, Mr. John Typadis of Mendon Road Solar, LLC spoke to the Commission. As a community solar project, Mendon Road Solar, LLC will have a Certificate of Eligibility with the utility company requiring the solar company directly allocate compensation via utility bill credits to participating members of the community. In a typical community solar project, the participant will receive two bills, one each from the solar and utility companies. For this project, Mendon Road Solar will provide National Grid with a list of program participants and receive discounted power. The solar company will allocate a bill credit to the participants, and National Grid will handle the backend so the bill credit will show on the National Grid bill. There is no limit to the number of participants beyond the capacity of the array, and the only requirement is that participants must be in good standing with National Grid. Utility customers with multiple meters can also participate. Approximately half of the credits could be allocated to one anchor recipient (large business, large use customer) with the remaining credits being allocated in blocks no bigger than 25 kWh AC. All recipients, no matter the size, would receive the credits directly on their utility bill as a separate line item. On average, one household could save approximately \$130 each year (assuming credit of \$0.01/kWh).

Vice-Chairman Eappen asked how participants could resolve billing issues. Mr. Typadis answered National Grid will handle any issues as part of its backend work. He also said usage will be monitored through data provided by National Grid and then shared with users.

Mr. Jason Gold, the project engineer, reviewed details of the site and plans with the Commission. There is an existing road to access the site. The site is near a National Heritage Polygon, and the appropriate RIDEM review applications have been submitted. There will be a fence surrounding the site with a total area of 3.67 acres within the fence. The entrance to the site will be widened to allow better emergency access. A proposed landscape screen along Park East Drive will provide additional screening and improve the view from Park East Drive. Because the ground will be seeded, there will be no increased stormwater. All the setbacks match requirements in the solar ordinance.

Electric will be underground up to the first pole. There is no outdoor lighting proposed or traffic impact. The solar panels will be installed on the area previously flattened and cleared. Earthwork is minimal. There are currently stockpiles of dirt and debris that need to be removed. The construction of the access road will require minimal grading.

Chairman Finlay asked for more information regarding the proposed low-growing pollinator to be planted under the panels. Mr. Gold said the plant growth will require minimal maintenance (see the Vegetation Management schedule within the meeting packet).

Vice-Chairman Eappen had a question about how long it would take the buffer trees to grow to their 20' mature height. Mr. Typadis answered that most of the trees will be 2'-5' height at installation, but he said the screen will appear taller due to the topography of the land compared to Park East Drive. Mr. Proft said there had been a discussion during the pre-application meeting about the trees along the southern area. That direction is where the sunlight is most prevalent so there was a concern that too much height would interfere with the panels' absorption. *(editor's note: Mr. Eappen was mistaken that the mature height of the vegetation will be 20 feet. In fact, it will be more like 7-12 feet).*

Mr. Proft had questions for Mr. Typadis:

1. How is the community program advertised, and how can people get involved?
A combination of word of mouth, speaking at public meetings, meeting the neighbors, and organic marketing is what they've used previously to attract public attention.
2. What is the sign-up rate in previous communities? Is there traction in signing up?
Yes, he feels there is traction in the surrounding neighborhood/community. It is a good benefit provided that nearly sells itself.

Mr. Proft then had questions for Mr. Gold:

1. Is there a potential risk for invasive weeds in the undergrowth to overwhelm the space between the buffer and fence created by any tree cutting?
No, Mr. Gold did not feel there was a risk due to a note in the plans stating that any ground disturbed in the process must be replanted with a conservation seed mix.
2. Does the existing curb cut have radii? Will the material at the apron match the curbs already used along Park East Drive?
The curbs along the entrance are entirely pre-existing and do not have squared edges.

With no further questions from Mr. Proft and the Board, Chairman Finlay opened the floor for the public hearing.

Mr. Scott Gibbs, of the Economic Development Foundation, stated that the roadway entering Highland Corporate Park is subject to the Declaration of Covenants and Restrictions, and a curb cut will need to be approved by the Declarant (EDFRI). This is not a condition for the Planning Board approval, but it is a condition within the Covenants. He also suggested using wildflowers for the ground cover vegetation. Other areas within the Park use a wildflower mix to create attractive ground cover that only needs to be mowed once a year. Mr. Gibbs also suggested Mendon Road Solar LLC reach out to the Declarant to see if some of the other businesses within the Park would be interested in participating. Mr. Typadis said that was a wonderful suggestion and that they will follow up with the Declarant.

V. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:43 PM: Secretary Miller

Second: Member Gardner

Discussion: None

Vote:

Chairman Finlay	Yes
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Vice-Chairman Eappen	Yes
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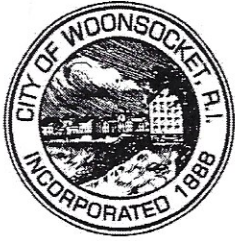
Secretary Miller	Yes
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Member Gardner	Yes
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Member Pratt	Yes
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Motion Passed	5-0-0
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Addendum: DRC Approval Letter
Mendon Road Solar



City of Woonsocket, RI

Design Review Commission

To: Mendon Road Solar, LLC
119 Braintree Street, Suite 211
Allston, MA 02134

Date: May 12, 2020

Re: Mendon Road Solar – Design Review Commission Approval

The Design Review Commission has **approved** Mendon Road Solar, LLC's application. The plans associated with the application are prepared by ESS Group and dated April 28, 2020. The matter was reviewed at the Design Review Commission meeting on May 12, 2020 under §12.1 – Design Review Overlay District of the Zoning Ordinance of the City of Woonsocket and the Design Review Guidelines developed by the Design Review Commission. The plan involves the installation of a ~995 kw solar energy system at 0 Mendon Road (parcel 50-4).

The Design Review Commission evaluates projects based on the following evaluation criteria: (1) architectural design (2) landscape design, (3) impacts on available utilities, (4) traffic impacts, (5) on-site traffic circulation, (6) overall visual quality, (7) relationship to surrounding building sites, (8) sign design and placement, and (9) site layout. The Design Review Commission made the following findings:

- (1) The architectural design of the project is appropriate for the type of project proposed. The array height will be limited to 12 feet and fence height will be limited to 7 feet. Black or green vinyl chain link fence will be used instead of a galvanized fence.
- (2) The landscape design of the project is appropriate for the type of project proposed. The project will be buffered from public view along its Park East Drive frontage by a 20-foot vegetative buffer with a variety of planted species. At maturity, the proposed species will be tall enough to hide the security fence from the public right-of-way.

The project will be buffered from public view from Armand Street by a 20-foot buffer of existing shade trees. Within the buffer, existing trees may be pruned but will not be cut. Beyond the buffer, trees may be cut, but pruning will be considered first. Stumps will not be removed after cutting to help maintain the integrity of the existing slope of the property.

The security fence will be set back approximately 60 feet from the end of Armand Street. In addition to being black or green vinyl, the fence in this area will include privacy slats to better hide the fence and array from the view of nearby residents. The array itself will be set back approximately 80 feet from the end of Armand Street and will be elevated

approximately 35-40 feet above the end of Armand Street due to the existing topography of the site.

A conservation and/or pollinator seed mix will be used in areas seeded and loamed for the project, including beneath and between the solar arrays and outside the eastern security fence. Vegetation outside the northern fence line will not be disturbed by the project.

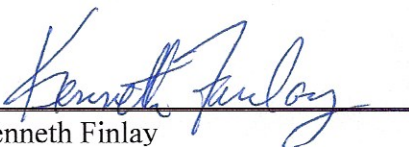
- (3) The project will have negligible impacts on available utilities. The site will not be served by municipal sewer or water and no lighting is proposed. Four utility-owned poles and one customer-owned pole will be installed.
- (4) The traffic impacts of the project will be negligible because the array will generally operate without on-site staff.
- (5) On-site traffic circulation is appropriate for the type of project proposed. The array was designed to accommodate maintenance vehicles on a crushed-stone service road/driveway. An existing curb cut will be used to provide access to the service road. No parking is proposed or required. The array is set back from the fence line a minimum of 10 feet to allow limited access around the perimeter of the site. The Woonsocket Fire Department reviewed the site plan and confirmed to the Administrative Officer that it was comfortable with the general site layout prior to the Design Review Commission meeting. The array and components will be accessible to the Fire Department via a Knox Lock and emergency system shut-offs are located near the entry gate.
- (6) Visual Conditions will be improved as a result of the project. Existing stockpiles and debris will be removed or leveled. Pollinator and conservation seed mixes will be planted on the property; current conditions on the property are deteriorated and unattractive. A vegetative buffer along Park East Drive will mostly screen the array and fence from the public right-of-way. Wiring associated with the array components will be buried. Some negative visual impacts may be experienced by property owners at the end of Armand Street, but given the nature of the proposed project, the applicant has mitigated impacts to the extent practicable.
- (7) The project is compatible with surrounding building sites. The project will have little to no impact on the industrial properties to the east and west along Park East Drive. Where residential zones abut the project, appropriate buffers and mitigation measures have been proposed. The applicant will meet the performance standards required by section 10.2-5 of the City's zoning ordinance and the requirements of section 14-5 of the City's Ordinance, titled "noise".
- (8) The signage of the project is appropriate for the type of project proposed and is compatible with the surrounding area. Signage is limited in size and volume and is required by and in conformance with various codes.
- (9) The site layout is appropriate for the type of project proposed. The mechanical components of the array are appropriately located near the access gate. The array is appropriately screened from public view.


Conditions of Approval:

1. Utility-owned pole locations in Park East Drive right-of-way shall be approved by the City Council prior to building permit approval.
2. The easement between the applicant and National Grid regarding the utility-owned poles on the applicants parcel shall be recorded in the City's land evidence record prior to building permit approval.
3. A decommissioning financial guarantee shall be provided prior to building permit approval. The amount of the guarantee shall be determined by the Administrative Officer after the applicant's projected decommissioning cost of the project is vetted by an independent firm on the State's MPA list. The applicant shall select and coordinate this third party review with a firm on the MPA list and provide the firm's findings to the Administrative Officer.
4. The applicant shall provide contact information for the project contractors and proof of liability insurance prior to building permit approval.
5. The applicant shall provide all State permit approvals prior to building permit approval, including RIPDES Application approval and Soil Erosion and Stormwater Control Plan approval.
6. The site plan shall specify that construction of the project shall not take place between 6 p.m. and 7 a.m. on weekdays and between 5 p.m. on Saturday and 7 a.m. on Monday prior to plan recording.
7. The site plan shall specify that on-street parking of employee vehicles or construction equipment shall not be permitted and that the developer will work with the Woonsocket Department of Public Works to ensure that traffic on Park East Drive is minimized, especially during peak commuting hours.
8. The map and lot numbers on the cover page and each page's title block shall be changed to match the map and lot number used on the survey plan prior to plan recording.
9. The site plan set should specify that the fence height will be a total of 7 feet, including the six inches that the fence is elevated above the ground to allow wildlife passage, if allowed by the electrical code.
10. The landscape plan shall include measures to avoid the establishment of invasive species on the western portion of the property where tree-cutting is proposed prior to recording.
11. The applicant shall coordinate with the Fire Department regarding on-site emergency response training.

As stated in § 12.1-7 of the Zoning Ordinance, all plans and designs approved by the Design Review Commission shall be executed as such. Failure to comply with approved plans shall be deemed a violation of this ordinance and of the building permit issued for such development, and shall cause the building official to issue a stop-work order until such time that the violation has been satisfactorily remedied.

Sincerely,


Kenneth Finlay
DRC & RCRC Chairman


Kevin Proft
City Planner/Administrative Officer