

Draft

MINUTES OF THE PLANNING BOARD PUBLIC HEARING

TOWN OF CHARLEMONT

8/6/09

Members Present:

Gisela Walker, Co-Chair

Dan Miller

Jerry Pratt

Kathy Eicholz

Trevor Mackie, Associate

Bill Stephens was present but previously recused himself from the hearing as he is an abutter to the proposed site.

Also in attendance were: Jim Schaefer, representing the Applicant; David Strong and Kevin Schulty of SED; Roy Schaefer, Applicant and Co-owner of Berkshire East; Mark Annas (sp), Registered Land Surveyor; Bambi Miller and Marguerite Noga of the Charlemont Historical Commission and several members of the public.

The meeting was brought to order at 7:09 p.m. by Walker. Walker opened the public hearing with a reminder that Board members were not to engage in communication outside of meetings or to hold Ex-parte meetings regarding ongoing hearings, Board members should explain that they cannot discuss the hearing and that all comments will be made at public hearings.

Walker then read a letter of support from Jay Healey.

Walker noted that at the last hearing there were some members of the public who brought up environmental impact concerns and that others in attendance heckled them. Walker requested that all in attendance be courteous and refrain from this type of discourteous behavior. Walker went on to explain that at their last meeting, it was agreed upon that the agenda for tonight would be to discuss location and design of the Wind Turbine project, and that at subsequent hearings the Board will address environmental and health, financial and safety monitoring and maintenance impacts. Walker stated that for time purposes, the Board will first ask their questions of the applicant and at 8:15, the hearing will be open to public comment.

Walker explained the criteria that the Board would use in determining the Special Permit, as stated in their Zoning Bylaws and stated that handouts were available with the criteria listed. Walker stated that the issues that need to be discussed are possible alternatives to the ridgeline location and the Town line issue, and then the size and design of the turbine. Walker then asked what the impact on efficiency would be with a different location.

Strong showed images of the proposed location of the wind turbine.

Schulte explained that their firm began a study of the best location for the project about eight months prior to submitting the application, and that it was not an overnight decision. Strong referenced the images, explaining that with reference to optimal wind speed, distance from properties, ski trails and meeting setback requirements, the location chosen was the best. Explained that to come down lower off the ridgeline, they would be getting lower wind speeds and closer to ski trails.

Miller asked why it wouldn't be possible to move the wind turbine downhill so that it would not be sticking out 300 feet above the ridgeline for visual purposes, and still not be greatly affected by less wind power.

Strong stated that shifting the turbine downhill would be a substantial difficulty as the area there is very steep.

Schulty stated that a more than 50' move would greatly impact the economics (feasibility) of this project but would have little impact visually.

Miller disagreed, and added that he would like to see some calculations at some point, for an expert to come in and look at this and answer these questions.

J.Schaefer stated that he has a great deal of money invested in this project, with little financial benefits and that SED has done many projects and know what they are doing.

Walker explained that the Board may want to hire someone for a second opinion, at the Applicant's expense, which is standard procedure and the Board's right, Schaefer said this is an issue for him.

Schulte stated that they would come back to the next meeting with a possible alternate location for the project to demonstrate the visual and economic impact it would have.

Walker replied that they had provided the Board with a plan B at one point and asked why they couldn't use that.

Schulte reiterated that the problem with coming down the ridgeline is that it increases the cost of construction, decreases the efficiency and impacts the feasibility of this project for Berkshire East.

Mackey asked how the characteristics on the wind speed graph were determined, and if it was 300 feet above ground, or 200 feet etc. Schulte stated that the hub height was set at 240 feet above ground.

Mackey requested the applicants provide figures for 50 (about 150 feet) and 65 (about 195 feet) meter wind speed towers for the next hearing. After some discussion as to the cost to them, and the Board being wise about what is important to ask for, the applicants agreed.

Walker reminded the applicants that at their earliest application the 600 megawatt tower (as opposed to the now proposed 900 mw) had been considered feasible.

Bambi Miller read a letter from the Charlemont Historical Commission, which stated that the Commission would like a second balloon test done at the proposed site and at an alternate site, so that their consultant can prepare a report on the visual impact of the project on historical places in town. The comprehensive report will be submitted to the Planning Board and the Mass Historical Commission.

Schaefer mentioned again the costs he is incurring for this project and these meetings and that the turbine is not going to be wildly profitable, He would like the Board to evaluate the site chosen, as they have spent a lot of time and money researching this and this project needs to be economic or it doesn't work.

Miller reminded the applicants that it is the Board's job to look into everything, and to get all the information possible.

Walker stated that there is some discrepancy with the town line between Hawley and Charlemont and there is the issue of whether or not the town line marker had been moved. Walker went on to explain that there is a traditional town line and an official town line and the Board needs to be sure the wind turbine will be in Charlemont.

Schaefer stated the he believes the town line is very clear and asked Mark Annas, their Registered Land Surveyor to show the Board.

Annas passed out maps, which had coordinates for Savoy, Charlemont and Hawley, from the Harbor and Land Commission records. Annas explained that they related the traditional town line to the legal town line and that the project will be in Charlemont. Discussion ensued as the Board studied the map.

The hearing was then open to public input, with most speaking in favor of the project, while two residents spoke against. Also, Ellen Landauer submitted written testimony on (negative) health and environmental impacts, while Helen Cardio submitted research which showed that there were no health impacts for this project and its location.

Mackey made a motion to continue the public hearing on September 17th at 7:00 p.m. The motion was seconded by Walker and passed unanimously. The public hearing was adjourned at 8:50 p.m.

At 8:55 p.m. the Board reconvened for their regular meeting. The Board reviewed and approved the minutes of the July 16, 2009 wind turbine hearing. Walker moved that she would like the Executive Secretary to create a petty cash envelope of about \$200.00, for the purpose of priority mailings and other Planning Board expenses. This is required because the town is moving to a new system for warrants only every two weeks. The motion was seconded by Stephens and passed unanimously.

The Board discussed establishing a revolving account at the next Town meeting, and agreed to discuss it with Joyce Muka, the Town Accountant.

Walker asked Eicholz if she would consider becoming the representative to the Regional Planning Board and attend monthly meetings with the Council of Governments. Eicholz agreed to attend the next meeting with Walker.

The Board decided to cancel their August 20th and September 3rd Planning Board meetings for lack of a quorum.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:12 p.m.

At 9:12 p.m. Walker made a motion to go into Executive Session, for the purpose of litigation, and stated that the Board would not be returning into regular session. The motion was seconded by Stephens and passed unanimously, as follows: Miller-yes, Eicholz-yes, Pratt-yes, Mackie-yes.

Respectfully Submitted,

Carlene Millett,
former Secretary to the Boards