

TOWN OF YORKTOWN CONSERVATION BOARD
MEETING MINUTES
February 2, 2022

Board Members Present: Co-Chair Phyllis Bock, Patrick François, Peter Alduino, Robert Waterhouse, Justin Pruyne, Kim Hughes - Secretary

Board Members Absent: Co-Chair Diane Dreier

Guests: Joe Shanahan, Con Edison Clean Energy Business

Phyllis Bock called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. The meeting took place via Zoom Conference Call.

Approval of Minutes of Prior Meeting: Done

Communications Received: None

Chair Persons Report: None

Reports from Other Committees: None

1. Foothill Street Solar Project

Proposed Solar Farm

Contact: Joe Shanahan Con Edison Clean Energy Business

Planning Board Referral

The Conservation Board was asked by the Planning Board to address the environmental impacts of the Foothill Street Solar project and to review the Barton & Loguidice (B&L) report. Our memos from August 19, 2021 and September 1, 2021 laid out our concerns that there are significant adverse environmental impacts which still have not been fully addressed by the applicant or by the B&L report. Although it is clear that solar is an important energy source, the particular location of this project is not the best when other, more suitable sites exist in town for this type of development, several of which have already been approved. We have repeatedly stressed that large scale solar installations be sited in appropriate places, as recommended by many publications. Places such as already disturbed sites, abandoned farm fields, rooftops and parking lots. This project will clear-cut an established forested area to install a field of panels. Many sites can be built on if adequate mitigation is approved to minimize adverse environmental impacts. Yorktown's wetland and tree ordinances are permissive, allowing for development, but it is up to the town Planning Board to determine if the mitigation is adequate. The proposed mitigation plan meets some of the requirements but does not mitigate all adverse impacts nor does it meet the needs of our suburban town. Solar fields do offset carbon in the atmosphere more than a forest, forests provide far more benefits than solar fields. In addition to carbon reduction, forests filter and recharge our drinking water aquifer, they clean the air, stabilize the soil from erosion, help to moderate temperature, provide habitat for birds, insects, reptiles, amphibian and mammals. A forest is larger than the sum of its parts. It's the soil, the leaf litter, and the roots, the herbaceous layer of woodland plants, understory and canopy. The loss of each individual tree can be mitigated by plantings or payment to the tree fund but the adverse impacts that result in loss of forest function is much greater. The documents submitted do not successfully mitigate for the loss of trees **and forest function**. Instead, the applicant claims that contributing a significant sum to the tree fund is sufficient. The applicant tries to show how a housing development would disturb the site, but sound housing development would not eliminate the

benefits of the forest but the clear cutting for a solar field will. Suburban development provides a variety of landscapes while solar fields are limited. The environmental report prepared by Barton and Loguidice follows the SEQR handbook. Each town must review the SEQR documents in relation to the size and character of its town. One example is the statement in the report that no core forest is present at this site. The definition of a core forest implies a large parcel. Suburban towns don't have large parcels and every forested area is precious. Forests of moderate-size and -age trees continue to provide valuable habitat and function. The Mohegan Outlet crosses this property in a cool ravine, with eastern hemlocks on the steep banks. Environmentalists have determined that cool ravines, can support unique species and larger buffers are needed to protect them. The adverse effects to this stream have not been addressed by the applicant or the B&L report. What will the impact of runoff from a grassland habitat have on the stream? Will a 100 ft. buffer adequately shield this riparian corridor from heat island effects of a solar installation? The B&L report assumes no other portion of the property will be developed. The Board is concerned of the adverse effects on the Mohegan Outlet if the 16 remaining acres to the SW of the outlet are developed without a conservation easement. The B&L conclusions do not address this possibility. The town's tree and woodland preservation ordinance shows the town's commitment to preserve trees and forest for the valuable function they perform. It is your responsibility to determine whether contribution to the tree fund would be equal to losing acres of a forest habitat, especially when there are other opportunities for this type of development in this town. The Planning Board needs to set an example and analyze the environmental loss beyond the ordinances for the benefit of the whole community and the future.

2. Solar Law Amendment

Proposed Local Law Amending Chapter 300 Regarding Solar Energy
Town Board Referral

The Conservation discussed the Proposed Local Law Amending Chapter 300 of the Town Code regarding Solar Energy. The Conservation Board supports the amendment to Chapter 300 of the Local Law regarding Solar Energy.