



## **Project Review Committee Meeting Minutes**

**Tuesday, July 1, 2025 at 3:00 PM  
via Zoom**

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*Members present:* Jim Pinkerton (Chair), Bob Bois, Stephan Chait, Art Dufresne, Eric Stevens, Pete Silverberg (incoming future member but did not vote at this meeting)

*Guests present:* Brandon Kibbe, Leah Bellus, Nils Behn, Jared Diamond, Craig Martin (Great River Hydro Solar); Shelli Harvey (abutter to Great River Hydro Solar project)

*Staff present:* Alyssa Sabetto

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Called to order at 3:00pm with a quorum present and chaired by Jim Pinkerton.

1. **Welcome and Introductions**

2. **Minutes**

Minutes of February 2025 meeting were approved with no changes on a motion from Jim, movement from Stephan and a second from Bob, with Eric abstaining because of absence at that meeting. Art was not yet present at the meeting. Approved.

3. **Chair Temporary Recusal**

Jim recused himself as Chair for the Great River Hydro 3.5-Megawatt agenda item due to his potential conflict of interest. Stephan acted as temporary Chair for that agenda item.

4. **Great River Hydro 3.5 Megawatt Solar – Vernon - 24-3714-AN**

Address: land between Fort Bridgeman Road and Governor Hunt Road in Vernon

Land Use District: Productive Rural

Potential Policies (pages 12-51): Energy 1, 3, 11, 14, 15

Background: 4.2 MW AC solar electric generation facility that proposes to occupy 14.46 acres ( $\pm$ ) on a parcel of land which totals 31.6 acres ( $\pm$ ), located off Governor Hunt Rd. in Vernon. The project will be interconnected to Great River Hydro's existing hydro facility located in Vernon. From there the electricity will be transmitted to the regional high voltage electric transmission system. Although it would be possible for the project to sell its output to any wholesale load customer in the region, it is anticipated that all of the electricity and environmental attributes generated from the Project will be sold to a local Vermont-based utility under a long-term agreement.

This project was discussed in February 2025. This second discussion will focus on changes to the project since that time and the Applicant's request for a letter of regional plan compliance. The Applicant has addressed concerns regarding aesthetics, wetlands, and natural resources, and it has protected an archaeologically sensitive area. The project AC output capacity has been reduced by 17% from 4.2 Megawatts to 3.5 Megawatts.

The project was determined regionally significant and generally in compliance with the Regional Plan at the February 2025 Project Review Committee meeting. There was not a letter submitted after that

meeting because of unresolved issues with the Town and the Committee's desire for the Town to provide feedback in advance of providing Regional comment. The Town did submit a letter (un-dated) to the Public Utility Commission that opposed the project, and that letter was shared with Alyssa on June 3, 2025. She shared it with the Committee in advance of this meeting. The Applicant is still looking for a Regional letter addressing compliance with the Windham Regional Plan. The Committee was tasked now with reviewing the project in relation to both project changes and the Town's expressed opinion.

Stephan reiterated that the project is regionally significant and in compliance with the Regional Plan. It is the Committee's decision how and whether to integrate the Town's sentiment into Committee comments. Craig Martin shared that the Applicant is disappointed with the position of the Town and that the Applicant would like to continue discussion with the Town, but have not received willingness to further engage. The Applicant has worked to address comments received from local and state stakeholders, and a document outlining those efforts was developed and shared with Alyssa and the Committee.

Nils Behn said that the Town letter leans on impacts to prime agricultural soils, and the Applicant feels that area is addressed in the construction plan by removing the prime ag soils from impacted land and stockpiling the soil on-site, then restoring it back into place after the project is decommissioned. Bob asked if there were changes made to the restoration/soil protection plan after the Town's comments, and Nils said no because prime ag soil stockpiling is a standard element of solar projects. Craig Martin said there was not a substantive conversation with the Town about the handling of prime agricultural soils, and the Town's concerns about that topic were not understood by the Applicant before receiving the letter. Eric asked if raising the racking was considered so that agricultural use could be continued with the panels in place. Nils said that sheep grazing was discussed with the local farming community, and the project would be happy to allow for sheep grazing. Raising the racking is not desirable in terms of aesthetic impacts.

Stephan reiterated the Committee's limited responsibility in relation to the project, asking Committee members again to consider how and whether the Committee wants to engage with the Town's sentiment, and what type of letter the Committee would like to submit. Stephan asked for Committee feedback. Eric said he supports limiting the letters to Regional Plan compliance and regional significance, and not to include Town sentiment. Bob said he feels there is a responsibility for the Committee to note the Town's comment/position but not a need to present an opinion on that position.

Stephan motioned that the Committee write a comment letter simply stating that the project is in compliance with the Regional Plan, it is regionally significant, acknowledge that the project is opposed by the Town but not offer a position about that opposition. Art joined the meeting at this point and Stephan updated him about where the conversation stood at that moment. Bob moved the motion. Art seconded. Art mentioned that he has observed frequent local opposition to proposed projects, and that this opposition seems to carry through various types of proposed projects. Stephan's motion passed, with Jim abstaining.

**ACTION:** Alyssa will draft, circulate, and submit a comment letter.

## 5. **Chair change**

Stephan stepped down as temporary Chair and Jim was reinstated to the Chair position.

## 6. **Recent Decisions and Updates**

- Relocation of 20 mobile homes out of flood hazard area in Tri-Park Mobile Home Park – Brattleboro - 2W0260-13 – permitted 6/4/25
- Installation of light poles for Sawyer Field at BUHS – Brattleboro – 700017-9 – permitted 6/4/25
- Upgrade of drinking water system at Shady Pines Park – Westminster – 2W0250-2 – permitted 5/16/25

7. **Next meeting**

The next regularly scheduled meeting is Tuesday, August 5th. Determination of a need to hold the meeting will be made closer to that date and the Committee will be informed either way.

8. **Adjourned at 3:43.**

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Respectfully Submitted, Alyssa Sabetto, Senior Planner