

Brandon Planning Commission Hearing
Proposed Energy Plan
July 15, 2019

Board Members Present: Lowell Rasmussen, Stephanie Jerome, Ethan Nelson, Bill Mills, Michael Shank

Others Present: Barbara Noyes-Pulling, Brent Buehler, Jeff Biasuzzi, Jack Schneider, Matt Orchard, Lindsey Berk, Edna Sutton, John Schneider

1. Call to order

Michael Shank, Interim Chair, opened the hearing at 6:02PM.

2. Public Comments

Michael Shank introduced the members of the Brandon Energy Committee and advised the Committee has developed an Energy Plan for the Town with the assistance of Barbara Noyes-Pulling of the RRPC. Brandon has chosen to develop an Energy Plan and once approved by the RRPC, will provide substantial deference with the PUC for future energy projects. Mr. Shank advised the Energy Plan will be available for viewing on the Town's website following the hearing. Barbara Noyes-Pulling advised the energy plans are sometimes long due to the 14-page legislative checklist that is required with Act 174.

Mr. Shank provided a PowerPoint presentation (see attached). It included information on the State and local energy goals. Mr. Shank advised the Energy Committee has started hosting workshops around energy efficiency as part of the Town's energy goals and policies, in addition to determining the Town's preferred solar sites for future projects. The Plan is primarily based on transportation, heating and cooling and electricity. The Plan was developed in accordance with the LEAP modeling – long-range energy alternatives planning. By 2050, Brandon is to achieve a 33% increase in energy savings. Mr. Shank noted Brandon is working towards its goals and has a lot of potential, with currently more than 100 solar sites. When mapping renewable energy, the Committee looked for prime resource areas where there are no constraints. In Brandon, the energy sources will include solar, some small-scale wind and bio. Mr. Shank outlined the known constraints where energy projects are restricted. Mr. Shank provided an overview of the maps that indicate a lot of solar potential. Ms. Noyes-Pulling stated Brandon gets consideration because there is 3-phase power running up Route 7 that is desirable to solar developers. Ms. Noyes-Pulling clarified that the white areas on the map either do not have solar potential or are included in the listing of known constraints.

Mr. Shank stated there has been discussion of doing a viewshed analysis to protect views the Town would like to preserve. This would require the Town doing a survey and would likely be a Planning Commission project. A requirement of the Energy Plan process is to outline the preferred areas. Mr. Shank noted all the areas in the Plan offer quality solar space and are outside the viewing eye to protect the classic Vermont view. It is hoped to grow the list in the future.

Matt Orchard asked if the Town is receiving requests for energy projects and it was noted the Town has received proposals in the past and currently just received another project request. Mr. Shank advised the Energy Plan is an effort to set up a good relationship with potential energy developers. Stephanie Jerome noted this type of energy plan has worked well in Sudbury.

Mr. Shank provided information on the Energy Committee's activities going forward and requested suggestions of what the Energy Committee could do for the community. Lindsey Berk asked about increased public transportation and Mr. Shank noted there is discussion of increasing public transportation and future train service. The Committee will advocate for a train stop in Brandon. He noted that biking

will be another project. Jeff Biasuzzi stated towns can have as many Park and Ride areas as they would like, which are good locations for EV charging stations. A suggestion was made to develop a Car-Share program. Mr. Shank advised the Town will be installing charging stations in the municipal parking lot that will be behind the Mobil Station. Mr. Orchard asked about carbon sequestering and Stephanie Jerome advised the legislature is going to be looking into this subject. Brent Buehler asked about screening of solar projects. Mr. Shank advised that regulations pertaining to solar could be no stricter than those required of other businesses. In the Energy Plan, there is information about good citizenship for proposed developers to encourage good business practices in the Town while working within the legal parameters. Mr. Buehler noted it doesn't make sense to have the same regulations as other types of businesses. Ms. Noyes-Pulling stated the regulations are whatever is already in the Town's zoning. The State has indicated the towns cannot be stricter with solar projects from other business projects. Ethan Nelson stated there was discussion about the type of natural screenings, however, it takes many years for some of the species to grow. Edna Sutton stated this area is massively rural and she does not understand why there cannot be strict controls over viewsheds. Mr. Shank stated viewsheds do not negate projects from being built, however, the Energy Plan would provide substantial deference when projects are being considered by the PUC. Ms. Sutton suggested this could perhaps be discussed at the State level to provide the local towns more protection. Ms. Noyes-Pulling stated the Town can ask developers to place more screening, but there cannot be a requirement outside what is required by other businesses. Jeff Biasuzzi noted Brandon requires Act 250 review at the DRB level and landscaping would be part of the Act 250 process.

Mr. Shank advised the Town has almost achieved the State's 2025 target regarding renewable energy. It was noted there has been discussion concerning a community solar project as the Committee is mindful of a solar project to benefit the community. Mr. Shank stated not many solar developers are considering community solar, however, Sun Common has been discussing this subject. Mr. Biasuzzi stated in some other towns, the developers were agreeable to the landscape requests, however, in the recent past he has seen push-back by the developers on voluntary concessions. Mr. Biasuzzi suggested if a Town has substantial deference, a developer may be more agreeable to concessions. Mr. Biasuzzi hoped that substantial deference will be helpful with compliance once a project is completed. Mr. Biasuzzi suggested one loophole to close is the requirement to conform to stormwater controls as the PUC review does not require this currently. Ms. Noyes-Pulling stated renewable projects are the State's prerogative and this would likely be a legislative level discussion. Ms. Noyes-Pulling noted the Town can request considerations during the PUC process.

Mr. Shank stated this is considered a living document and can be updated in the future. The full Energy Plan will be available for viewing on the Town's website.

The hearing closed at 7:00PM.

Charlene Bryant
Recording Secretary