



RUTLAND CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

City Hall – 52 Washington St. – Rutland, VT 05701
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Special Meeting Minutes September 1, 2021

The meeting was held in person and by teleconference because of the new COVID-19 protocols.

Present: Patrick Griffin (PG), Alvin Figiel (AF), Rebecca Mattis (RM), Sarah Roy (SR) and Dave O'Brien (DO).

Also Present: Marlene and Philip Allen of SameSun of Vermont; Barbara Spaulding recording secretary.

RM, Chair, called the meeting to order at 5:30 pm.

- I. ADDITIONS/DELETIONS – None.**
- II. PUBLIC COMMENT – None.**
- III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – August 25, 2021.**

AF moved to approve the minutes of August 25, 2021. DO seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

IV. OLD BUSINESS – SameSun of Vermont solar net metering project at 34 North Main Street.

Marlene Allen discussed the advance notice filing with the Public Utility Commission and the need to submit the application by August 31 in order to avoid the tariff increase. She said the development plan for the property is a work in progress and Philip added that they are open to suggestions but the car port is “as is” with a pitch of 5-7 degrees to the south. This will mean the removal of the existing trees. The development plan for underneath the car port includes a kiosk welcome center, food trucks, picnic tables, a destination for EV car charging stations.

PG asked how many charging spaces are planned. Philip said 2 highspeed spaces (25 minutes) and 4-6 level 2 spaces. PG asked if there is potential for more spaces. Philip said there will be conduit for expansion but the profit is not in the charging stations.

SR said she thought it unrealistic that people would walk downtown from that corner while their cars are charging. She asked if other sites closer to the downtown were considered because aesthetically this project is just adding parking to the area and that shouldn't be where the bar for that property is set. Philip discussed the disadvantages of the Stewarts Tesla station and the Amtrak location. He added that the owner of 34 North

Main Street has not sold or leased the property in the past 10 years and the property has sat vacant for 21 years.

DO agreed about the unlikelihood of people visiting downtown while their cars are charging but he is also concerned about the challenges of getting vehicles in and out of the property. He asked if there had been discussion regarding egress through Walgreens instead of using the existing curb cuts.

The Allens discussed the potential of the development as a statement to the City's solar capital designation and their intentions of not building a traditional solar array but a canopy structure. Philip added that the property owner is interested in the development plan and how the corner will look after 21 years of the site being blighted.

AF discussed the proliferation of curb cuts on that block and his concerns for what is the oldest part of the City. He said the proposed development adds to the extensive parking lot and asphalt in the area. He would hope that the City and RRA would develop a plan for the whole area and create a development like the Starbucks building as opposed to typical strip development.

Philip discussed the potential for screening, picnic tables, kiosk and creating a park look at that site that doesn't resemble another parking lot. He said this would be SAMESUN calling card and wants it to look great.

RM said she liked the welcome center idea but is sad to see that the existing trees will be removed and asked if trees could be planted on the northside. Marlene presented the aesthetic review for the property that was prepared by TJ Boyle Associates. The review's methodology was based on the Quechee Test to determine whether a project would have an adverse aesthetic impact to the area. The consultant concluded that the filling station solar project would meet the Quechee test and would not be unduly adverse with regard to its impact on aesthetics. PG asked Barbara to scan the document and provide copies to the Commissioners. PG also discussed his concerns for the lack of public input on Act 248 projects. He suggested that the City engineer weigh in on closing all of the existing egress and determining an ability for access via Walgreens or Norton Place.

Marlene said the DRB will review the development plan.

AF proposed running the canopy from Woodstock to Terrill Street. Philip said a plan like that should come from city officials not SameSun. Marlene suggested that their project could be the beginning of redevelopment for that block.

PG said he is not opposed to the development but to a lack of landscape screening and egress issues.

Philip presented an email from Lyle Jepson who was a former critic of the project. DO read the email into the record.

PG asked what are the next steps. Marlene said they wait to hear if their application is approved by the PUC, develop a viable site plan, traffic study, conclude egress issues, determine costs and work with the landlord on finalizing the lease.

Philip discussed the future of electric vehicles including a Ford truck that will be available in 2022. He added that for the solar canopy itself there is no requirement for SameSun or the private landowner to provide any of the proposed amenities but they want to create a destination for the City and has also considered adding electric bike stations.

PG moved to write a letter encouraging the Mendick family to close the existing egress and access the property from the rear lot. Philip said unless the Mendick family is offered a reduction in the property tax or the tax on solar he could not advocate for this request. Motion failed for lack of a second.

AF suggested getting the city engineer involved with the egress. RM said she would speak to the city engineer and report back to the Commission at their next meeting on Sept. 8.

Marlene added that they will be required to apply for a building and zoning permit as well as make a presentation to the DRB.

The Allens were thanked for attending the meeting and providing information regarding their plans for 34 North Main St.

- V. **ADJOURN** – PG moved to adjourn. AF seconded. Motion passed unanimously. The meeting ended at 6:35 pm. The next regular meeting will be held September 8, 2021.

For the Commission: Barbara Spaulding, Recording Secretary