



Franklin Regional Council of Governments

Franklin Regional Planning Board— *MINUTES*

Date & Time:	Thursday, March 25, 2021 / 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.
Location:	Zoom Meeting ID: 857 7008 9365, Passcode: 895385
Facilitator:	Jerry Lund, Chair - FRPB; Peggy Sloan, Planning Director - FRCOG

FRPB MEMBERS

Jerry Lund, Chair, Leyden, At-Large, FRPB Executive Committee
Julia Blyth, Clerk, Northfield At-Large, FRPB Executive Committee, Rep. to the Connecticut River Streambank Erosion Committee
James Basford, Orange At-Large, FRPB Executive Committee, FRPB Rep. to the FRCOG Council, FRCOG Executive Committee, Rep. to the Route 2 Task Force
Arthur Baker, Leyden Planning Board
James Brodeur, Leyden Select Board
Marybeth Chichester, Colrain Planning Board
Ron Coler, Ashfield At-Large
Stanley Garland, Bernardston Select Board
Jennifer Gross, Wendell Select Board, FRPB Executive Committee
Wayne Hachey, New Salem Select Board, FRCOG Council
Thomas Hutcheson, 1st Vice Chair, Greenfield At-Large, FRPB Exec. Comm., Rep. to the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Committee
Lizbeth Irving, Montague Planning Board
Emily Johnson, Deerfield At-Large, FRPB Executive Committee
Nathan L’Etoile, Northfield At-Large
Charles Olchowski, Greenfield At-Large, FRPB Executive Committee
Jane Shaney, Ashfield Planning Board
Don Sluter, Whately Planning Board
Joseph Strzegowski, Conway Planning Board
Alec Wade, Orange Select Board
Chuck Washer, Shelburne Select Board, FRPB Rep. to the REPC
Marguerite Willis, Charlemont Select Board
John Wheeler, Shelburne Planning Board

FRCOG STAFF

Peggy Sloan, Planning & Development Director; **Kimberly Noake MacPhee**, FRCOG Land Use & Natural Resources Program Manager **Liz Jacobson-Carroll**, Administrative Services Assistant;

PRESENTERS/GUESTS

Emily Cole, Deputy Director, American Farmland Trust
Richard Chandler, Ashfield Planning Board
Robert Cherdack, Ashfield Planning Board
Jennifer Tufts, Northfield Open Space Committee
Susan O’Connor, Northfield Energy Committee

1. Introductions and Review and Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes	J. Lund, Chair – FRPB & FRPB Members
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J. Lund convened the meeting at 6:00 p.m. A round of introductions followed.

W. Hachey moved to adopt the 1/21/21 minutes, with the attendance list amended; T. Hutcheson seconded the motion, and the motion passed by roll call vote with five abstentions (Brodeur, Strzegowski, Wheeler, Johnson, Gross).

2. Presentation and Discussion on Solar Facility Siting (principles and guidelines for siting solar, farmland siting best practices, and energy and land use information)	E. Cole, Deputy Director – American Farmland Trust
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E. Cole’s presentation on dual use or co-location of land for agriculture and solar energy generation (sometimes called agri-voltaics) emphasized American Farmland Trust’s goals and principles. These include supporting accelerated solar development that doesn’t convert farmland or displace agriculture; the belief that agricultural lands can play a meaningful role in hosting solar energy facilities; and a conviction that much more than solar energy should be harvested from the land on which a facility is sited. Further, AFT is committed to prioritizing farmland for agriculture and farmers. Cole referred to an illustration indicating that compatible facilities and crops could produce 60% more solar energy and agricultural crop through dual use on two units of land compared to different single uses (one unit of agricultural crop and one unit of solar energy) on two units of land.

Cole reviewed important elements considerations when designing solar facilities, such as: the impact of pole spacing and panel coverage on the balance of sun and shade upon soil and livestock; the ability to adjust panels to allow for equipment passage or sunlight-tracking; and the potential of bi-facial panels to catch solar energy bouncing back off the land. She mentioned several things to aim for in the construction phase: maintaining topsoil undisturbed; avoiding any re-grading of the land; and post-construction remediation. Care should be taken to ensure compatibility of the array and the agricultural use of the land over time, she said. Maximizing flexibility to allow for changing use – from one crop to livestock to another crop, for example, should be a goal. Arrays mounted on posts planted deeply -- without the use of concrete footings -- are preferable because they can be installed and removed relatively easily, and leave more land available for agricultural and ecological purposes.

Cole itemized ways a well-planned installation can bring long-term benefits to farmland, farmers and the environment. Regarding ecology and the environment: regenerative practices can improve carbon sequestration and moisture retention in times of drought; wildlife habitat can be created with the inclusion of native plants that support pollinators; wildlife corridors for migration can be accommodated; new micro-climates can increase biodiversity; and environmentally degraded areas can be restored. Regarding farmers and farmland: agri-voltaic use protects farmland from permanent development; preserves access for farmers just starting out and leasing land; and provides income diversification and stability. There was some discussion regarding the Solar Massachusetts Renewable Target (SMART) program.

Cole concluded by noting ways that all ground-mounted solar arrays, not just those erected on farmland, may be improved to the benefit of all stakeholders. These include ecological and landscape-

level land-use planning; designs that maximize environmental benefits; developers' commitment to further impact the community positively via transactional benefits (such as setting aside land for open space, and permanently protecting land through easements); and ensuring a well-vetted and well-funded decommissioning plan.

In response to questions, Cole indicated that pole-mounted arrays are engineered to withstand high winds, that farmers sometimes own their own small solar arrays, and that the SMART program does not currently include provisions for health or other emergencies that might prevent farmers from meeting contractual obligations to farm the land continuously. She noted that while AFT does not provide consulting services, she may be able to assist individual towns in locating these. Further, she anticipates valuable data from an UMass study underway now of 6 or 7 dual-use arrays planned or existing across the state, and looks forward to another 10-15 years of technological improvements to enhance array efficiency. There was discussion of crop choices, rotation plans, and the vetting of these through the SMART program.

3. Update on FERC Relicensing	K. MacPhee, FRCOG Land Use & Natural Resources Program Manager
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While pointing out the complexity of the federal hydropower relicensing process, with multiple stakeholders, laws and regulations, K. MacPhee focused her presentation on FirstLight's currently inadequate response to the "equal consideration" clause added to the Federal Power Act in 1986. The clause states that this must be given to

- power and development;
- energy conservation;
- protection of fish and wildlife and their habitat;
- recreational opportunities; and
- preservation of other aspects of environmental quality, e.g. water quality and historic preservation.

Further focusing on the latter three, she summarized plans articulated in FirstLight's current application (with annotated satellite views of four locations), then indicated the need for improvements, including:

- More water in the river channel
- Better fish ladders and addressing related problems associated with the canal
- Reducing negative impacts to federal and state-listed species
- Adding and improving recreational amenities that meet ADA requirements
- Better recognition of the cultural heritage of the region, especially that of Native American people

MacPhee noted problems that need to be further addressed:

- Large daily fluctuations in river flow
- Riverbank erosion
- Entrainment of juvenile shad, American eel, shad eggs and larvae
- Negative impacts on dragonflies
- Insufficient recreational amenities for use over the next 50 years

K. MacPhee emphasized that the application is particularly weak in its failure to address significant riverbank erosion problems, for which FirstLight fails to take responsibility. In fact, its application

proposes an increase in the volume of water to be removed from the river, stored in the reservoir, and then released to generate energy -- with no plans for mitigation.

MacPhee shared FRCOG’s goal to develop a holistic Adaptive River Management Plan. The plan will articulate a schedule and means to:

- establish baselines identifying all categories (riverine, geomorphic function, cultural, economic, habitat, water quality, etc.) of the ecosystem resources
- monitor the impacts of the management and operation of the hydro projects
- restore and protect riverine functions and riparian land;
- protect cultural/historical artifacts
- improve recreational opportunities

Further, according to information FirstLight filed with FERC, the 2019 annual revenues of the Northfield Mountain Project (approx. \$158,398,000) and Turners Falls Project (\$18,090,000) dwarf the total average cost (\$54,000 per year or \$2.7 million over the 50-year license) for the recreational asset improvements FirstLight is proposing in their Recreation Management Plan. She suggests:

- annual investments in recreation facilities and programs that are benchmarked to annual revenue
- facilities, including the fish viewing area, that are compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act
- programming, including cultural interpretation, that is coordinated with local organizations serving native peoples

4. Other Topics Not Reasonably Anticipated 48 Hours in Advance of the Meeting/Adjourn/Public Comment	J. Lund, Chair - FRPB
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P. Sloan and J. Lund thanked T. Hutcheson for his many years of good work on the FRPB and the FRCOG Executive Committee, and wished him luck in his new position in the Berkshire County town of Dalton. Sloan noted that the FRPB annual election will take place at the June meeting.

T. Hutcheson moved to adjourn the meeting, C. Washer seconded the motion, and the meeting was adjourned at 7:46 PM.

Documents Distributed / Presentations Viewed:

- Agenda
- FRPB Minutes, January 21, 2021 – DRAFT
- “Solar Siting on Farmland”, Emily J Cole, American Farmland Trust
- “FERC Relicensing Update, March 25, 2021”, Kimberly Noake MacPhee, FRCOG

The next meeting will be held on Thursday, May 27, 2021. Copies of all documents are available. Please contact Liz Jacobson-Carroll at ljc@frcog.org or 413-774-3167 x101.

Respectfully submitted,

Julia Blyth, Clerk - FRPB