

TOWN OF SIMSBURY - ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
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CALL TO ORDER

The Regular Meeting of the Economic Development Commission was called to order at 7:32 a.m. in the Main Meeting Room of the Simsbury Town Offices, 933 Hopmeadow Street. Present were: Chair Kristen Barnett, Vice Chair David Moore and Commissioners Jay Devivo, Thomas Frank, Maura Fitzgerald and Evelyn Golden. Absent were David Balboni and Mark Brady. Melissa Appleby, Deputy Director of Administrative Services, James Rabbitt, Director of Planning and Community Development and residents Laura Nigro and Joe Tracy were also in attendance.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Chairwoman Barnett moved to approve the Minutes from the June 8, 2017 meeting. Mr. Moore seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF DEEPWATER WIND SOLAR PROPOSAL

Chairwoman Barnett recused herself from this part of the meeting.

Vice Chair Moore began the discussion noting the First Selectwoman's letter asking the Town boards and commissions to evaluate the Deepwater proposal and a follow-up letter from Thomas Cooke asking for comments by July 31, 2017. Mr. Moore noted the 1200-page proposal is available online and explained that the first seventy pages contain the general gist of the proposal. He also noted that none of the Town boards or commissions, including Planning and Zoning, have any say in this. The Siting Council can do what it wants, therefore a petition has been filed. This is why the First Selectwoman has asked for comment from the Boards and Commissions.

Commissioner Devivo joined the meeting at this point.

The EDC is asked to make a comment by July 31, 2017. The Town is about to be granted party status with the Siting Council. The environmental study is being waived. The EDC's goal today is to decide whether or not to have a special meeting to provide time to further review the proposal or whether the EDC would like to have the Acting Chair, Mr. Moore, respond to the First Selectwoman's request on behalf of the EDC. In addition to the petition by the Town, there is an added petition regarding waiving the environmental study. Deputy Director Appleby explained that the First Selectwoman is looking for any recommendations or feedback from the boards and commissions. Commissioner Devivo clarified that the EDC is being asked whether they would agree to a waiver on the environmental study and whether the EDC would be supportive of the project in general. Commissioner Frank noted that everyone on the EDC needs time to read the report and proposed that each member submit views instead of having a special meeting. Mr. Rabbitt added that this is the commission's opportunity to look at the palpability and scope of the project. Suggestions can be made to make changes including improving aesthetics, for example. Vice Chair Moore raised several concerns the Commission should be aware of including the potential for generating income for the Town. Another is how the neighbors in the affected area will be impacted. These concerns should be commented on. Commissioner Frank discussed considering what is the best use of that property from an economic development standpoint over the next twenty-five years. Mr. Devivo raised the question of how this property will be taxed and what cash values will be generated. Considering the complexity of this discussion, Mr. Frank suggested that the Commission raise a series of concerns and/or questions to be addressed.

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Comments were permitted from two residents in the audience. Laura Nigro, one of the neighbors being impacted by this plan, stressed that the Town's opinion about this matters. She added that it affects many people and that it's not just about the money, but the impact it will have on the Town. Joe Tracy, who lives next to abutters, said that this is prime farmland and forest land. He encouraged Commissioners to come look at the land with the Siting Council on September 12, 2017. Both residents thanked the Commission for their efforts.

Mr. Rabbitt encouraged commissioners to read the Senate bill. The Town has run calculations on the tax implications. The draft number looking at the asset evaluation including depreciation right now is approximately \$600,000 per year over a twenty-year run, \$26,000 per acre. The implications are approximately twelve million dollars over twenty years.

Mr. Moore discussed the fact that the Commission is being asked to come up with a recommendation based on speculation. He agreed with Commissioner Frank's idea of identifying issues the Commission would like addressed. Whether or not to have a special meeting was discussed and the fact that there may not be a quorum was noted. Mr. Devivo added another concern which was understanding the costs associated with this project and its effect on abutting properties. Perhaps money should be given to abutting property owners to offset their loss in value or they could be given free electricity. Mr. Rabbitt noted this is an industrial zoned piece of property and that to date, the Town has not found anything saying solar reduces the value of abutters' land. Mr. Devivo stressed that the Commission has an obligation to the abutter's interests. Mr. Frank pointed out that the Commission's core issue is what is the best use of this land from an economic development standpoint. If it is tied up this way, is that the best use? Commissioner Golden added that she is worried about the effects on Simsbury, which is known as a wonderful residential town that has a lot of value to offer anyone who chooses to live here. The Town is known for that nationally. Will that change? And will Simsbury be known as the town with the largest solar development instead of Simsbury as it is now? She sees the benefit of a solar farm but questions where they are putting it and the large size of it. Mr. Rabbitt noted three other solar farms in CT in Brooklyn, Pomfret and Sprague. He added that the EDC does have the ability to influence the process. The implications on tax but also sense of place for Simsbury affects economic development. After some discussion, Mr. Moore asked the Commission whether this is something they want expressed through him or whether there should be a special meeting to further discuss the matter. Mr. Frank suggested that each commissioner state their opinions on the matter. Much discussion ensued during which the following points were expressed. Mr. Devivo stated it is unfair for abutting property owners to see their values potentially drop and that he would be supportive of the project if most of the abutting property owners felt "OK" about how it was done. Mr. Frank opposes the project in its current location. He is in favor of solar energy but objects to the way the State is forcing it upon the Town, adding that we don't know if it's a good thing from an economic development standpoint. Mr. Rabbitt noted that there are direct and perceived impacts to be considered depending on whether people live directly near the area or just drive by and enjoy it. He also noted there would be one vehicle per day in and out of the site. Commissioner Fitzgerald stated that residents took that risk when they bought their property, adding that she would like to see some concessions to the residents in that area. Mr. Moore pointed out there is a substation nearby, which has been there for a while. He also said he is a huge proponent of non-fossil fuel energy and feels this is the best use of that land at the moment because it will generate income for the Town, which is desperately needed. He supports this project but would also support a careful environmental study be done. Commissioner Golden is in favor of solar energy but not in that location in the middle of farmland or near people. There was discussion regarding the best use of that land and the incremental financial effect it will have. Mr. Moore summarized the overall consensus from the group to be that everyone likes the idea of solar power but there is some concern about the location. And there are concerns about what

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the overall economic impact will be for the Town and the specific economic impact for the abutting property owners.

Mr. Frank moved to have the Commission delegate Vice Chair Moore to frame a statement reflecting the views and concerns of the present Commissioners. Commissioner Fitzgerald seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed.

Chairwoman Barnett rejoined the meeting at this point.

Mr. Moore moved to table the remaining agenda items to be discussed at the August meeting. Ms. Fitzgerald seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed.

REVIEW OF NEDC DRAFT REPORT TO BOARD OF SELECTMEN - tabled to August meeting

DISCUSSION OF EDC RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING STRATEGIC ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN - tabled to August meeting

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 9:08 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Karen Haberlin
Commission Clerk