



MEMORANDUM

To: Board of Selectmen Town of Simsbury

From: Simsbury Historical Society

Date: July 20, 2017

Subject: Tobacco Valley Solar Farm

The Simsbury Historical Society is actively involved within the community to preserve and promote the Town's rich history and welcomes the opportunity to add its observations and recommendations in response to Deepwater Wind's proposed Tobacco Valley Solar Farm petition.

In general, Simsbury is an established historic town with a well-defined character shaped by a legacy of heritage buildings, organized patterns of development and a variety of landscapes ranging from rural to town center. Most of these identifiable characteristics are valued resources that collectively make Simsbury special by shaping a sense of place. A resource-based evaluation using historical/cultural, visual and natural resources in conjunction with economic resources is an effective means to arrive at successful development solutions. That evaluation begins with understanding what the town has and concludes with protecting what residents value. That process forms the basis for our analysis and conclusions with respect to the Tobacco Valley Solar Farm.

Deepwater Wind presented material in the public hearings emphasizing a few key strategies:

- Keep two of the existing five tobacco sheds
- Clear cut trees where interfering with the panel racks
- Attempt to screen 156 acres of solar equipment at ground level using setbacks adjacent to residential properties and ten foot high, solid vinyl fencing

In response to the presentation material to date, the Simsbury Historical Society offers the following observations and recommendations:

OBSERVATIONS:

- **Debate focus:** The substance of the Tobacco Valley Solar project discussion should not be limited to whether solar farms are or are not desirable but rather focus on how the Town will manage the changes proposed while preserving its community character.

- **Buildings & landscapes:** The Tobacco Valley Solar project proposes to be situated within a rural reserve context. The tobacco sheds and, more broadly, the agricultural land inhabited by those sheds are valued elements that collectively help define a rural preserve context. Those landscapes under review now are distinctive patterns shaped by the circumstances of location and time and together speak to authenticity. Context should dictate the type of response and preserving authenticity within that context is the key to protecting town character.
- **Screening options:** Deep setbacks with extensive woodland cover as an extension of residential rear yards can be a very effective buffer while the characteristics along a roadside, agricultural area typically include more naturalistic and random elements. Using these types of contextual elements will maintain the rural preserve character on dissimilar properties and uses.
- **Farmland preservation:** The land under review now is currently zoned either Residential or Industrial and remains undeveloped or leased farmland. It should be noted that there is a significant state-wide as well as town-wide interest in preserving existing farmlands. Farmland preservation goes to the heart of protecting natural, historic and visual resources.
- **“Nuisance” issues:** Noise and reflectivity/glare are two issues that may adversely impact dissimilar properties whether adjacent or within visual/audible range. Will either the equipment or panel construction generate noise and how much? Will light shining off a vast area of reflective surfaces be noticeable on adjacent properties or even higher elevations? Nuisances diminish property values and degrade community appearance and objective data is necessary to determine this potential.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Building preservation:** Preserve all five tobacco sheds by redesigning the solar array fields and maintain adequate separation between the two to protect the historic buildings consistent with the cultural resources assessment survey. Consider entering a dialogue with the Simsbury Historical Society to repurpose the sheds for educational exhibits with limited access as deemed safe for the public.
- **Character preservation:** Ten foot high solid vinyl walls are an anathema to the characteristics of a natural, rural landscape. Rather than installing a repetitively detailed, monolithic, plastic wall we recommend using varied natural screening such as segments of earth berms, random tree clusters and smaller undercover vegetation and even smaller wooden structures or screen segments to break up the scale and enhance authenticity. Work with a landscape architectural firm to develop screening that is creative and loose and may not even entirely screen what lies behind.

- **Archaeological studies:** Follow the recommendations for the moderate sensitivity areas identified in the cultural resources assessment survey to include a systematic pedestrian survey in areas impacted by constructions to identify archeological materials that have been brought to the surface. In addition, in the moderate sensitivity areas we recommend some sample auguring to determine if intact subsoils are present. If augur testing determines that intact subsoil is present additional shovel testing is recommended to identify any intact cultural materials that may be present.

In areas deemed to be high sensitivity areas for archeological deposits the recommendation is to subject the area using shovel testing to assess its dispositional integrity following recommended professional practices.
- **Viewshed preservation:** Eliminate all of the solar arrays south of #85 Hoskins Road to minimize the adverse visual effect on the historic house being enclosed on two sides with panel fields as viewed from the second-floor rooms. Add vegetative screening along the edge of the study area to help the historic house viewshed at #100 Hoskins Road as well as #85.
- **Light and noise pollution:** Have an objective survey prepared by an independent source that analyzes and quantifies the potential for offsite light and noise pollution on adjacent properties or, in the matter of light trespass, higher elevations within view of the study site such as along the Talcott Ridge or the west ridge of Westledge and Highridge roads.

The basis for all of our recommendations can be found in the Town's adopted policy - *2007 Plan of Conservation and Development* - and specifically in the sections: *What We Want To Protect – Agricultural Resources*, *Historic Resources*, *Scenic Resources* and *Community Character*.



Joseph Buda

President Simsbury Historical Society