

Charlemont Planning Board  
January 16, 2020 Meeting Minutes  
Charlemont Town Hall Meeting Room



Members Present: Bill Harker, Co-Chair, Gisela Walker, Carlene Hayden, Bob Nelson.

Others Present: Joe Shanahan CEC, Marguerite Willis

Call to Order

Planning Board Co-Chair Bill Harker called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.

Approval of Minutes

The draft minutes from the January 9, 2020 meeting were approved as written.

Appointments:

6:15PM Joe Shanahan came to discuss the status of the Tea Street large solar array approved November 5, 2019 and request a minor change regarding the natural screening of the array. He said the longest delay resulted from working with the utility. At this point they are awaiting Fannie Mae to finalize a decision regarding the impact of the addition of natural screening to the Hathaway property value. Appraisals were completed and all paperwork submitted as requested by Fannie Mae, but it is unknown when they will issue a decision on whether they as the mortgage underwriter will approve the addition of the screening. CEC wishes to begin construction of the solar array in the spring, and do not want this to delay the project. Joe Shanahan said they would like the planning board to approve a minor change as an option to avoid the potential of a delay. They would plant 20 arborvitae on the property they are leasing, just south of the panels, avoiding any planting on the Hathaway property. The planning board suggested that alternate low growing bushes be considered, as opposed to a row of arborvitae. This was acceptable to Joe Shanahan.

Motion:

Walker moved that in relation to the Willard Trust and Hathaway's' easement and the construction of the large scale solar array on Tea Street, the Planning Board agrees with the contractor that the screening will be moved from the Hathaway property to the southern side of the solar array using low growing bushes such as forsythia or lilacs no less than six feet in height. The Board considers this a minor change to paragraphs 6 and 7 under the heading, "Screening," in the special permit dated November 5, 2019, which will not require a public hearing. Hayden seconded the motion and all planning board members voted their approval and the motion passed unanimously. It is understood that if Fannie Mae makes a prompt decision, that the original screening plan will be followed.

Board Discussion

The Planning Board discussed their desire to find additional members. Walker will write something to potentially post to make residents aware of the need.

Appointment:

7:30 Marguerite Willis discussed the need for housing in the village. She said that while the area is beautiful, the village needs help. She said that she intends to consult with Byron Gilchrist to see if he has ideas. Marguerite Willis would like to see more young people and young families, as well as elderly in the town and wants to show Charlemont as a great place to live. Some positive changes that are on the horizon

are fiber optic internet in 2021 and the upcoming paving and sidewalk improvements this year. Marguerite Willis suggested that there may be zoning changes that could be implemented to encourage growth in the village. These may include reducing setback requirements, encouraging multi-family housing and including language regarding the town being an opportunity zone included in the zoning bylaws. Harker stated that some houses need to be replaced and that in some cases, repairs are not made in order to keep real estate taxes low. There was some discussion as to whether the town should consider fines on properties that are not maintained. Walker said that setbacks in the village are already reduced and that owner occupied triplexes are already allowed in the village. Nelson suggested that language related to the opportunity zone could be placed on the front page of the town website. Walker said that the Oxbow Motel could be used for senior housing, though Harker questioned why seniors would want to live so far from useful services such as transportation, stores and hospitals. Marguerite Willis said that she is very pleased to see that Berkshire East and The Great Outdoors were looking at developing along the Deerfield River. Perhaps a high end RV camp or condos with a lower level garage to keep the living area over potential flood waters along the river. Additionally, HGTV is looking at helping out a town in an upcoming television series. Charlemont should submit an application including video and photos to get in the running for this opportunity. She also said that the town is going to seek the recreation tax they have pursued in the past.

#### Board Discussion

Harker stated that there are about 60 telephone poles being staged at the fairgrounds for the upcoming fiber optic installations. Additionally, the fairgrounds are used and available for family events. Walker asked Willis if she would be receptive to an amendment being introduced at the upcoming annual town meeting to change future annual town meeting days or times so they are not as long and possibly run for two days. Willis said that she has proposed this change.

#### Adjournment

At 8:23 p.m., on a motion by Nelson and seconded by Hayden, the board voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting.

Respectfully submitted,  
Bob Nelson

#### **Documents viewed in the Planning Board meeting of 1/16/2020\***

1. Agenda for meeting of 1/16/2020
2. Draft Minutes from the January 9, 2020
3. Plot Plan of the Tea Street Large Solar Array
4. Street View of Tea Street Large Solar Array through the Hathaway Property

\*Documents are stored in their respective files

**MINUTES ARE DRAFT UNTIL SIGNED BY THE BOARD**