

Town of Belgrade Planning Board

May 12, 2022 / 6 p.m.
Belgrade Town Office
990 Augusta Road

This meeting can be watched at
<https://youtu.be/bfAfkjy7-l4>

MINUTES

Planning members present: Peter Rushton, George Seel, Craig Alexander, Sara Languet, Rich Baker.

In-person attendees: Code Enforcement Officer Richard Greenwald, Selectperson Dan Newman.

Remote attendees: None.

1. OLD BUSINESS

- A. Discussion and consideration of **Commercial Development Review Ordinance amendments** addressing commercial solar facilities. The Board preliminarily discussed marrying setbacks and screenings because they work in tandem, and what percentage of forestland to be clear cut. Mr. Alexander advocated consistency with the subdivision ordinance, which prohibits clear-cutting. Mr. Seel said he could not support setbacks that would limit owners from developing less than 2/3 of their property. He added that as with any commercial development, buffers will apply to streams, deer yards, wetlands, etc., though solar farms will be regulated more rigorously than other commercial developments. Mrs. Languet shared a chart showing what percentage of usable property would be available depending on a square parcel's acreage and the perimeter buffer. Mr. Seel expressed comfort with a prorated approach to setbacks to allow owners to develop up to a defined percentage of their property.

Mr. Newman proposed non-direct routes for power lines and access roads to limit their visibility. Mrs. Languet and Mr. Seel noted the visual impact assessment will also come into play for property with steep inclines. Mr. Seel said the ordinance will need to address stormwater and phosphorous runoff and off-site flooding, as is the case with other commercial developments. Mr. Alexander endorsed Mr. Seel's proposed 250-foot setback from residences and from roads, and 125 feet from property lines, whichever is most stringent. The 125-foot setback would also apply to transformers and inverters. Mr. Seel wanted to ensure the Board does not create an unintended consequence of developers building only the largest, industrial-scale solar farms in Belgrade. Mr. Newman noted exemptions to setbacks will have to be made for roads and transmission lines into the property.

Mr. Newman proposed 80-percent visual obscuration of solar development with evergreen buffers that shield the development in the wintertime, berms and fencing with landscaping. Mr. Rushton noted the need for tools so the 80-percent standard isn't subjective during an enforcement. The Board agrees the visual impact assessment would be used as a measuring tool. It also agrees on a minimum 50-foot buffer along property lines, 200 feet along public roads and 250 feet along common property lines with an existing residential dwelling unit, though no more than a half-acre of the development should be viewed from Belgrade waters or designated viewpoints. In addition to the language from Mr. Seel's memo, he proposed adding: "The Planning Board may approve an alternative, equally effective visual screening for the specified 80-percent obscuration, but only when supported by the findings of the visual impact analysis conducted in accordance with the requirements of this ordinance and its associated visual impact mitigation measures."

The Board agreed on language regarding safety fencing, signage and emergency services, and added to the KVCOG template for visual impact, including the town's public recreational and scenic resources to include the lakes, the Minot Hill Road, the highest portions of the Belgrade Lakes Golf Club, and elevations of 600 feet or greater accessible by a public road. The Board made few changes to the KVCOG template sections on maintenance conditions, modifications, and satisfaction with all aspects of capacity and plans submitted.

Mr. Seel suggested some additions to the template related to access roads and transmission line corridors. The Board reached no conclusion about how best to prevent straight shots of access roads and transmission lines to mitigate visual impact. Mr. Newman asked about requiring soil tests during the life of the development.

Mrs. Languet moved to adjourn. Mr. Seel seconded. Motion approved 5-0. The meeting adjourned at 9:38 p.m.