

HOPKINTON CONSERVATION COMMISSION

SITE WALK NOTES FOR MARCH 29, 2021 at 5 PM COMOLLI SOLAR PLAT 2 LOT 73 UNIT 2

Attendees:

Conservation Commission – Harvey Buford, Lydia Lanphear

Planning Board – Ron Prellwitz, Carolyn Light, John Pennypacker

Hopkinton Land Trust – Marilyn Grant, Cynthia Johnson

Applicant Representatives – Ricky Comolli (owner), Jason Gold (EES), Colleen Debenedetto (Centrica)

Public – Barbara Capalbo

Ricky explained his dad and uncles are not back from snow bird country and that his task is merely to show us the property and not engage in project discussions. Most of the project questions and discussions then fell upon Jason and Colleen. Several of us had stories of visiting the site to get auto parts when it was Perry Motors. Everyone parked near the Unit 1 buildings and walked south along the old rough road down the steep slope to the open area where the solar panels will start. We then walked to the extreme south end of the limits of disturbance, backtracked, and walked east a short distance to where an old road climbs to the top of the quarry hill. We did not visit any of the open spaces beyond the limits of disturbance since the engineers are not familiar with those areas.

Brownfield – We walked through areas with large amounts of glass, metal and plastic protruding from or lying upon the soil surface. Jason says they have done no investigations as to any pollution on the property, but they know the history of the auto junk yard. They do not intend to do any investigations until after Master Plan approval. It seemed unexpected they would undertake a brownfield project without first doing site investigations. Jason said it is not technically a brownfield as it is not on an official list maintained by RIDEM.

Wetlands – I asked why they show a BMP area only to the north end when it seems most of the property slopes to the south. Jason and Colleen produced a new set of plans we have not seen that now identify this feature as a detention pond. Jason said the areas draining south will not exceed the existing runoff since much of the area is already cleared and that no detention will be required by RIDEM for the south runoff. They have not explored the wooded wetlands west of the Limits of Disturbance and are unable to characterize the area including the pond depicted there. The one detention pond discharges to that area.

Tree Cutting – The west and SW area will have considerable tree cutting over to the perimeter wetland. Outcroppings in the SW will be demolished along with part of the quarry hill. Ricky said they did not use blasting when quarrying the large stone blocks in this area. We located the flagged centerline for the fence in the SW. The SE side will require tree cutting all the way up to the top of the granite hill to reduce shading. Much of the area between has been heavily quarried over the last few years. They are not the right persons to address questions about what native species around the PSES are to be sustained per Town Council conditions or to describe the ground cover within the fence area.

Easement / Ownership – They are not the right persons to discuss the Land Trust Easement conditions set by the Town Council. I had invited Barbara Capalbo because she was a main author of the Town Council Conditions, including the easement wording, for transfer of the property to the Land Trust. This discussion will have to be deferred.

Roads and Trails – Their understanding is Unit 3 is not developable and it will not have town standard road access across Units 1 and 2. It is their understanding the Unit 3 owner is in agreement with the revised internal road or path depicted on the plans however they differ from what was depicted on the original condo plans filed with the Town. Harvey pointed out there is a half-mile easement across the Stolgitis property to the west which the Land Trust also has use of to reach Grills Wildlife Sanctuary to the east. This easement in the past was the only legal access to the quarry located on what is now Unit 2. The Land Trust wishes to gain access using the same road that will serve the solar project and from there what is now depicted as an 8 ft wide path to have better vehicle access to their Polly Coon (pedestrian) Bridge across the Pawcatuck

River and to the future Unit 2 easement or fee simple acreage from Comolli.

Solar Performance – Harvey stressed the Conservation Commission considers obtaining highest efficiency as something to be expected because it is better for the environment. Colleen identified Centrica as the solar designer. Regarding getting the highest performance design from panel selection, layout and options such as tracking hardware, she and Jason said they have switched to higher performance panels which reduced the project footprint. They have not considered tracking panels which add about 30% efficiency. They did not know why. They will provide information on panel incident light rated efficiency and site configuration efficiency during their presentations to the Planning Board.

Fence – Harvey brought up that the Conservation Commission considers getting away from extremely ugly and industrial looking chain link fence to be high priority. That neither the Hopkinton Solar ordinance or the National Electrical Code requires chain link fence which the applicant has specified on the plans. Harvey referred them to the better performing high-tensile farm fabric type fence with black coating that has much better aesthetics. He will provide them product information where they can also learn of its use on other solar projects. Colleen asked about the fence and said with 6" vertical stays the fence fabric could theoretically be climbed the 7 feet by an intruder, and while not a code issue, the insurer might object. Harvey suggested the fence could be topped with the standard option of one or more strands of barbed wire and they would have to have a believable letter from the insurer explaining why the ugly industrial chain link fence must somehow be chosen over the higher grade of attractive farm fence.

Decommissioning – This topic did not get discussed.

Reforestation – This topic did not get discussed.

Schedule – Jason and Colleen said they could be ready for Master Plan at the April 7 Planning Board meeting but don't know that they can be accommodated on a busy agenda.

Final Thoughts – The Conservation Commission has already said we consider this a good site and we support the project. Now we want to assure it becomes an exemplary project everyone will be proud of.

Adjournment – Approximately 6:15 PM.

Because we were often spread out and not all participating in every conversation, I am just writing this up as my notes based on my conversations - Harvey Buford