

**TOWN OF COLUMBIA  
PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION**

Adella G. Urban Administrative Offices Conference Room  
323 Route 87, Columbia, CT  
**Monday, April 8, 2024 7:00 pm**

**Regular Meeting – HYBRID  
MINUTES**

**Members Present:** Chairman Rick Nassiff, Vice-Chair Justin Riendeau, Vera Englert, Thomas Currier, Dave Holcroft, Walter Tabor

**Members Excused:** Robert Powell, Larry Preston (Alternate), Ed Madrak (Alternate)

**Staff Present:** Town Planner John Guskowski (via Zoom), Board Clerk Mary Kay Hyman

**Others Present:** Dan Csaplar of USS Vineyard Solar, Mark Reynolds of Rob Hellstrom Land Surveying and 2 others were present.

**1. CALL TO ORDER:** R. Nassiff called the meeting to order at **7:00 PM**.

**2. ROLL CALL AND SEATING OF ALTERNATES:**

No Alternates present to seat.

**3. ADDITIONS/CHANGES TO AGENDA:** None

**4. APPROVAL OF PZC REGULAR MEETING MINUTES of March 11, 2024**

R. Nassiff **MOVED** to **APPROVE** the Minutes of March 11, 2024 as presented; J. Riendeau **SECONDED**; D. Holcroft and V. Englert **ABSTAINED, MOTION PASSED 4:0:2**

D. Holcroft and V. Englert Abstained as they were not present at the March 11, 2024 Meeting

**5. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS:** None

**6. OPEN PUBLIC HEARING:**

R. Nassiff Opened the Public Hearing at **7:01 PM**

W. Tabor Recused himself from the Public Hearing

**6.1 PZC 2324-03:** Special Permit Application for USS Vineyard Solar LLC., for a Ground Mounted Solar Array as an Accessory Use at 468 Route 87, Map 030, Lot 038, Zone RA, Lot Area 56.32, Section 8.15.

Dan Csaplar representing USS Vineyard Solar LLC., stated they are proposing a 1-megawatt solar facility on Walt and Nancy Tabors property at 468 Route 87. He stated USS Vineyard Solar is based out of Minneapolis and has offices in both Fairfield and Boston and that they develop, construct, own and maintain small scale community solar arrays at no cost to the property owner that are 5 megawatts and lower. They have built over 100 arrays to date and reached out to the Tabors, based on their location and the conditions of the property. He stated they

have two pathways to move forward, one with Eversource and with whom they have received a green light to interconnect with their existing infrastructure, as well as the approval from the Town of Columbia PZC. He stated the new facility will power roughly 750 homes with renewable electricity. The footprint of the array will be on 7-acres of the 55-acre parcel, the arrays will be mounted on a single AIS tractor system, and it will be tilted toward the east during the morning and then slowly tilt toward the West in the afternoon for increase in efficiency and greatest production. The array will be enclosed by a 7-foot farm style fence, which is woven wire on wooden posts. The existing access road will be extended out to the array, will be 12 ft wide and remain gravel with an overall improvement. He stated the construction phase will be about 3 to 6 months, with 1 week for installation of the panels, 1 week for trenching wires and the remaining time going to Eversource coming out to interconnect to the infrastructure. After that the array will sit and create electricity. He stated they will send an operation maintenance team out every few months to clean the panels, mow the grass and make sure everything is operating correctly.

D. Holcroft asked if residents would be able to take advantage of the electricity produced. D. Csaplár replied yes, the residents/customers of Eversource can apply for a discount through the SCEFP program through Eversource.

D. Holcroft asked if this negates the previous proposal for a Holistic Village on the property. W. Tabor replied that this is unrelated.

R. Nassiff asked what the lifespan is of a solar array. D. Csaplár replied this will be a 20-year PPA, at which time their lease agreement requires them to come in and replace the existing panels.

R. Nassiff asked for thoughts from J. Guskowski who added that the array would be placed on the far end of an open field, several hundred feet from neighbors and surrounded by a wooded tree line on all sides and will be surrounded by a 7-foot fence.

T. Currier asked D. Csaplár if they or other companies have run into issue with disposal of the panels after 20 years. D. Csaplár replied that they have not been in business long enough to get to the 20-year mark of replacement. He stated there are endeavors to make sure these panels are fully recycled. T. Currier stated a few years back there was a question about what to do with the panels after 20 years. T. Currier asked C. Csaplár if he could provide information regarding this issue in relation to other companies who have gotten to this stage of the process. D. Csaplár stated he could investigate providing this information.

R. Nassiff asked where the panels are produced. D. Csaplár stated the panels are made in China and have a projected Life Span of 20 years. He stated there is a large push to use panels made in the US, but they are 70% more expensive and not made as well. US manufacturers use thin film and are not as safe.

Walt Tabor of 468 Route 87 asked D. Csaplár about the chemical makeup of the panels. D. Csaplár replied that the panels are made up of silicon aluminum and glass. He also stated that the State of CT has regulations in place requiring them to make sure the manufacturers put the panels through extensive testing from a leaching perspective to make sure that the chemicals, if the panels were to break, do not leach into the ground.

V. Englert asked what USS Vineyards interest is in these projects and asked for confirmation that USS Vineyard will retain ownership of the materials and that any problems would come directly back on them and that the homeowner is free of liability. D. Csaplar replied yes this is true.

T. Currier asked D. Csaplar where there are existing arrays. D. Csaplar stated that there are currently two in development, one in Torrington and one in Ellington. He stated 95% of up and running facilities are in Minnesota.

R. Nassiff stated that if the panels are removed from the site after 20 years, that will preclude any Town Zoning perspective.

#### **CLOSE OR SCHEDULE TO CONTINUE PUBLIC HEARING**

R. Nassiff **MOVED** to **CLOSE** the Public Hearing at **7:20 PM**; J. Riendeau **SECONDED**; **MOTION PASSED 7:0:0**

#### **7. UNFINISHED BUSINESS (Discussion/Possible Action)**

**7.1 PZC 2324-02:** Special Permit Application for Dava Siedman of Fairview Farm, LLC., for a Major Impact Home Occupation at 301 Rte. 66, Map 028, Lot 021, Zone RA, Lot Area 6.4, Section 8.5.4.

**(Received 2/12/24) (Applicant WITHDREW Application on 3/26/2024)**

R. Nassiff asked J. Guskowski for the status of this Application. J. Guskowski stated that there is a large storage building/barn on the property that had been used for decades as an unregistered illegal commercial self-storage operation and the Applicant wanted to market the property as a legitimate storage business by applying for a Special Permit to operate as a Major Impact Home Occupation. The property has since been sold and the Application has been withdrawn and no action is necessary. The conditions of the sale have not been disclosed, but the Town will continue to monitor property use.

**7.2 PZC 2324-03:** Special Permit Application for USS Vineyard Solar LLC., for a Ground Mounted Solar Array as an Accessory Use at 468 Route 87, Map 030, Lot 038, Zone RA, Lot Area 56.32, Section 8.15.

**(Discussion/Possible Action or Public Hearing Continuation of Special Permit Application)**

T. Currier asked if there would be any view of the array from abutting neighbors. R. Nassiff stated he does not believe so, but maybe from those on Beaudet Terrace. The Commission discussed the location of the array and concluded that they feel it is far enough off the surrounding roads.

R. Nassiff **MOVED** to **APPROVE** the Special Permit Application for USS Vineyard Solar LLC., for a Ground Mounted Solar Array as an Accessory Use at 468 Route 87, Map 030, Lot 038, Zone RA, Lot Area 56.32, Section 8.15.; J. Riendeau **SECONDED**; **MOTION PASSED 5:0:0**

W. Tabor was reseated.

#### **8. NEW BUSINESS (Discussion/Possible Action)**

**8.1 PZC 2324-04: Site Plan Application for Robert Caldwell of Caldwell Realty LLC., to Construct a Vehicle Repair Shop at 41 Route 6, Map 002, Lot 020, Zone CM-1, Lot Area 9.68, Section 31.2.6. (Receive/Discussion/Possible Action on Site Plan Application)**

R. Nassiff stated this is a Site Plan and therefore does not require a Public Hearing.

Mark Reynolds of Rob Hellstrom Land Surveying identified the location of the property in the CM-1 Zone, between Route 6 and the Trail. He stated the property is just under 9.7 acres and does abut residential properties at the front of the property, but the structure will be toward the rear of the parcel. He stated the proposal is for a Vehicle Repair Shop, but the Applicant will be doing both repair and restoration work on vehicles. He then stated that the entrance access will be from Route 6 and the DOT after review has requested a stop sign and a stop bar at the end of the apron because it is a Commercial property. He stated the proposed driveway will be gravel with a paved Apron onto Route 6, in the same location as the existing entrance to the property. He stated  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an acre will be cleared for the development of the building, which will be 110 ft by 50 ft with a 40 ft wide gravel parking area, which will allow for turning of trailered vehicles. They will be cutting a bit into the grading of the hillside to create a level area for the building to sit on with a frost wall and slab type construction. He identified the location of the septic required by the Health Department and stated it will be of minimal use and would be about the size of that needed for a two-bedroom home. He stated the roof drainage and surface runoff would be collected in a basin at the front of the property leaving a 50–75-foot wooded strip between it and the neighbors. He stated the building will be a single story steel shell building and is Zoning compliant with the overall development being  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an acre, which is well under the allowable 2.5 acres on a 10 acre parcel.

R. Nassiff asked about handicap parking. M. Reynolds stated the parking area around the front of the building will be level and there is ample opportunity for ADA access anywhere along the front. He stated he would consult with the owner about extending a concrete pad at either end of the foundation to create better access to meet State Regulations, if needed. R. Nassiff asked J. Guskowski for input. J. Guskowski stated that the requirement may be based on a ratio and there may be an exemption for a building less than a certain square footage, but this is not a Zoning building code issue. R. Nassiff agreed the Commission does not need to address concerns outside of the Zoning realm of responsibility.

D. Holcroft asked if the property owner and business owner are one in the same. M. Reynolds stated yes, it is owned by an LLC, but they are one in the same.

J. Guskowski then stated that action cannot take place as we have not received approval from the Eastern Highlands Health District for the design of the Septic System. This approval is needed to make sure the site is suitable from a Public Health standpoint.

V. Englert then asked if the owner could be present at the next meeting to answer questions regarding the number of employees, hours of operation, designated delivery drop off and turnaround for larger vehicles, lighting of the parking lot, etc. M. Reynolds did reply that there would be building mounted lights to extend over the parking area, but he would ask the owner to attend the next meeting to address these concerns.

W. Tabor asked about signage out by the road and V. Englert asked if there would be a gate. M. Reynold stated the DOT is not in favor of placing signs in the right of way, so at this time he does not believe the owner will be installing a sign or a gate.

R. Nassiff stated based on the need for additional information the Commission will continue Discussion/Possible Action at the next PZC Meeting scheduled for April 22, 2024 at 7:00 PM.

## **9. REGULATION REVISIONS (Discussion)**

### **9.1 Section 52.7.19 Planned Neighborhood Housing**

J. Riendeau stated the Subcommittee would be meeting with J. Guskowski tomorrow (Tuesday, April 09, 2024 at 8:30 AM) to finalize the language of the Revisions, which he will distribute to the full Commission for review, before a formal walk through and presentation of the Drafts at the next PZC Meeting scheduled for Monday, April, 22, 2024.

## **10. COMMUNICATIONS AND REPORTS:**

R. Nassiff asked if all Members present have completed the required Land Use Training. All those present replied yes.

V. Englert asked if ZEO Connie Kisluk had been asked to attend a meeting. R. Nassiff replied that he spoke with C. Kisluk, and she will send him an email with specifics of items she feels do not need to be regulated or with any other concerns she has with the Regulations. He then said that if her presence is needed at a meeting regarding enforcement issues and/or if anyone has specific questions, he can request her presence or address those with her. V. Englert stated if the Commission can obtain an updated report, they may be able to see if there are any reoccurring violations where the Commission may be able to make changes to alleviate the situation by simplifying the Regulations. R. Nassiff added that any violations that the Town is taking legal action on cannot be discussed in an open meeting.

## **11. COMMISSION OPEN DISCUSSION: None**

## **12. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS: None**

## **13. EXECUTIVE SESSION: The Commission did not go into Executive Session**

Pending Legal Action per State Statutes Section 1-200(6)(B)

## **14. ADJOURNMENT:**

R. Nassiff **MOVED** to **ADJOURN**; J. Riendeau **SECONDED**; **MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY**

The meeting was adjourned at **7:50 PM**.

Respectfully submitted by Mary Kay Hyman, Board Clerk

Please see the minutes of subsequent meetings for approval of these minutes and any corrections hereto.

This meeting can be viewed in its entirety on the Town of Columbia You Tube Channel.