

**MINUTES**  
**Underhill Conservation Commission**  
**November 13, 2017**  
**Underhill Town Hall**

Present: Karen McKnight, Daphne Tanis, Nancy McRae, Amy Golodetz and Pat Lamphere

Absent: Dan Steinbaur, Laurie Graham, Peter Hiskes

Welcome and Opening Remarks: Karen welcomed all and reviewed the agenda.

Public Comment: No person(s) were present for public comment other than, the Underhill Energy Commission presentation and discussion.

*Guest Speaker(s):* **Peter Bennett from the Underhill Energy Commission, presented ‘Solar Energy Goals, The Green Lantern Group Proposal, Collaboration and Exchange of Ideas’.** Also accompanying Peter were Ruth Julianelle of the Underhill Energy Commission and resident, Steven Webster.

*Discussion/Concerns:*

1. See attached 3 page presentation presented by Peter Bennett for a Town 150 kWatt Solar Array.
2. Benefits to the Town -
  - a. Favorable Status with State; see Act 248– ‘gives ‘Standard deference’
  - b. Combined lease and tax break credit of approximately \$5,000.00 yearly
    - i. State Tax credit approximately \$1500
    - ii. Lease assessment payment approximately \$3,50
3. Draw backs/concerns –
  - a. Aesthetics – view a solar farm on one of Vermont’s most beautiful Scenic vista  
However, location would be hidden from view of town’s people and visitors.
  - b. Wildlife – location is bedding for deer and a Wildlife Cooridoor (use Biofinder app)
  - c. Potential damage to landfill cap with underlying toxins
4. Other concerns –
  - a. Vandalism

- b. Fence or no Fence
  - c. Possible wildlife Study
  - d. Testing results from Vermont State contractor Ross Group, Inc.
5. Summary and Follow up
- a. UCC to look at other potential Sites
  - b. Wait on testing results
  - c. Commitment from UEC and UCC to work together on input to the 'Town Plan' and Underhill Town 'Resource and Open Space Map'.

Approval Minutes: October 11, 2017 minutes were not approved.

Adjournment: The meeting was officially adjourned at 8: 03 p.m.

Next Meeting: Monday, December 11, 2017, 6:30 p.m., Underhill Town Hall

Respectfully submitted, Daphne Tanis, 11-13-17 draft

## **Q&A on Proposal for Net-metered Solar Array on Underhill Landfill**

Q: What is the proposal from Green Lantern Group?

A: Green Lantern Group (GLG), a large solar array developer, has proposed putting a 150KW solar array on the Underhill capped landfill. The town would benefit financially at approximately \$5000 per year.

GLG would do all the engineering studies and, if they receive Agency of Natural Resources certification, would pay for the construction. GLG would assume all liability risk.

GLG, based in Waterbury VT, has an established track record with developing solar arrays in Vermont capped landfills.

Q: What is the EC role in reviewing this?

A: The Underhill Energy Committee (UEC), as set out in their mission statement, would review all the energy issues pertaining to this proposal and look at options for siting and other financial models. They would report their findings to the Selectboard (SB).

Q: What are the main issues in siting a solar array in Underhill?

A: While the UEC is concerned primarily with siting from an energy standpoint – pollution risk, adequate insolation (e.g. shading issues), expected output, maintenance requirements, and comparison to other proposals – they are also aware of and concerned about environmental issues. These include use of the land for other purposes, adverse effects on wildlife, aesthetic issues.

The risk of damaging the landfill cap is considered by many to be negligible as numerous successful landfill projects have demonstrated, and as implied by the fact that the state considers landfills to be a preferred site for solar projects.

Q: Are there other possibilities for such an array ?

A: With respect to available town-owned land, the UEC has not identified any other qualified sites. Privately owned land is always a possibility but developers at present are focusing on what the state has defined as preferred sites: capped landfills, out-of-use gravel pits, roof-tops.

One governing factor in a town solar project is that it require no capital outlay by the town. The GLG proposal meets this requirement.

Q: What are possible pro's and con's of this proposal?

A: Pro's

- All costs and virtually all risks would be borne by the developer.
- Offers worthwhile financial benefits to the Town.
- Landfill is not suitable for any other human purpose other than recreational enjoyment .
- The landfill is a preferred site for a solar project as defined by state.
- Minimal to no apparent adverse effects on wildlife. (we've determined that no fence is required except surrounding the high-voltage connections at one location on the site, so impacts on wildlife, if any, should be minimal)
- Helps meet solar energy goals for towns prescribed by state law (~7.5MW for Underhill by 2050)
- Helps offset electricity that would otherwise be generated by fossil fuels or nuclear. The project would produce enough electricity to provide the annual needs of at least 31 homes.
- A possible learning experience for those who pass through the site (e.g., the solar project could be a "station" on the nature trail and/or have a plaque that describes the project and why it was sited in the conservation district)
- This would be a temporary installation—all equipment would be removed and the site returned to its current state at the end of the project's useful life—probably 20 – 35 years.

Con's:

- Aesthetic impacts as perceived by some
- Possible wildlife impacts
- Potential damage to the landfill cap

Q: How is State involved in siting renewable energy?

A: Under Act 174, the State of Vermont is asking every town to write an energy plan in line with the regional plan. If done, the Public Utility Commission (PUC) will give the town's plan "substantial deference" instead of just "due consideration" in Act 248 hearings regarding large renewable energy project siting in the town.

In concert with the Planning Commission (PC), this process calls for establishing (town) approved sites for renewable energy siting (doesn't include small residential sites) and setting targets for total increases in renewable energy generation in each town. The UEC acts as an adviser to the PC on siting that involves energy issues and has already spent considerable time doing so.

Q: How do we view conservation issues?

A: Members of the UEC are all strong environmentalists. At the same time, we recognize that the biggest environmental threat in history – climate change – is threatening the

planet. We believe therefore that we must do what we can on a local level to help in this battle.

Given the battle we're faced with, the UEC views conservation more broadly perhaps than the usual focus. In a sense, we feel we are helping in a small way to conserve the planet and its life and resources.

We realize there are always trade-offs in siting large renewable energy projects. In this case, they are set out in the Pros and Cons mentioned above. For this reason, we are open to additional sites which offer as good or better opportunities.

Q: Why not wait for better solar technology?

A: Always a fair question. In the case of solar, incremental changes occur on a regular basis but, like waiting for better computer technology before buying a computer, it's better to go ahead with the best technology currently available rather than waiting forever.

Q: Who makes the decision on this sort of proposal?

A: The SB has the final say on whether this or other proposals for town net-metered solar arrays make sense.

As explained above, the UEC will give our opinion on the energy issues and whether this proposal appears attractive. We have not completed our analysis as yet.