

MINUTES
INLAND WETLANDS AGENCY
OCTOBER 28, 2015 - 7:00 P.M.
TOWN HALL ANNEX - COMMUNITY ROOM 2

I. ROLL CALL

Agency: Scott, Block, Ashworth, Williams, Furlong
Staff: Jones, Galetta

Chairman Scott called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. and sat Furlong for Sutphen.

II. PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS – None

III. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF October 14, 2015

MOTION: To approve the minutes of October 14, 2015, as written.

Motion made by Block, seconded by Furlong, 4 in favor, 0 opposed, 1 abstention (Williams)

IV. NEW APPLICATIONS – None

V. PENDING APPLICATIONS

1. IWA 15-09, The Sandbox Indoor Volleyball Facility, 1500 Gold Star Highway

Robert Schuch, of Schuch Engineering, reviewed the application with the Agency. The plan has been modified based on staff review and comments at the site walk. The driveway crossing the wetlands has been reduced to 12' however the width will be maintained at 18' above this area to allow for heavy machinery and septic installation. Schuch noted that he received confirmation from Bob Russo, a Certified Soil Scientist, that the wetlands is an intermittent water course. Staff noted that it is still regulated by the Agency but there are no inland wetlands in that area. In response to Groton Utilities (GU) concern about stormwater runoff, the parking lot grading has been modified and stormwater will be treated by a hydrodynamic separator before infiltration. The discharge area will be seeded with a wetmix that includes plants that can withstand water and are used in wetlands restoration. The plan still requires the filling of 200' of wetlands to support a sidewalk and excavation of wetlands to install wing walls and raise the head wall. The applicant plans to request a waiver of the frontage sidewalk requirement during the Site Plan application process with the Planning Commission. If the sidewalk is waived there will be no wetlands impact. Staff noted that the Agency could also determine that a sidewalk would have an impact that is too great for the wetlands. Reactive to comments from Ledge Light Health District (LLHD), the septic system has been redesigned to accommodate higher volume wastewater from the use of on-site shower facilities. Initially, the septic system bordered the 100' regulated area whereas now it is located outside the 100' review with the exception of the reserve.

Staff noted that the site was previously disturbed under another permit. Most of site is in the 100' upland review area but will be fairly low impact development with

the exception of the sidewalk. GU is comfortable with the design which does flow to the reservoir and LLHD has approved the re-designed septic system. Additionally, there is a Memorandum of Understanding between the owner and GU relative to the maintenance of stormwater facilities. Staff also noted that GU has not asked for water sampling.

The Agency discussed stormwater runoff, the proposed sidewalk, and parking facilities, noting that the real issue they need to address is the question of the sidewalk.

MOTION: To approve the The Sandbox Indoor Volleyball Facility application for the following reasons:

1. The upland area of the site was previously disturbed and filled.
2. The applicant has demonstrated that the stormwater discharged from the site will be adequately treated so as to limit the impact to the wetlands.
3. The Agency finds that the proposed wetland fill and wetland excavation will have a significant impact on the wetlands in that these wetlands play a critical role in filtering stormwater runoff before water flows to the drinking water reservoir.

This permit is subject to the four standard conditions and the following additional condition:

1. There shall be no fill or excavation of the wetlands between wetland flag numbers 1-1 and 1-6 as shown on sheets 4 and 5 of the plans last revised October 15, 2015.

Motion made by Ashworth, seconded by Block, so voted unanimously.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

1. 1240 Poquonnock Road, Poquonnock Road Solar Project, SolarCity Corporation, Petition to the Connecticut Siting Council

Staff introduced the project to the Agency. This is an application for a solar photovoltaic (PV) array on Groton Utilities (GU) treatment plant property. The petition is before the Connecticut Siting Council. The Agency has no jurisdiction over the proposal but it can offer comments. Staff described the proposed location as 1240 Poquonnock Road, which is south of I-95, in an RS-20 zone, and within the Water Resource Protection District. It is directly adjacent to the Groton Reservoir and Smith Lake with access off North Road.

Len Mediavilla of GU explained that the City of Groton has entered into a multipartnership arrangement to place a solar PV array at their water treatment facility where an electrical substation and transmission lines are already located. It is presumed that the electric energy generated by the array will be consumed within the confines of Groton.

The City of Groton owns the fields and will be paid a lease fee on an annual basis. This is a 20-year contract. Mike Singer, of Brightfields Development was not available to be part of the presentation but is the contact person. SolarCity is financing and is the owner of the solar panels. The panels will be maintained, fixed when broken, and changed out if better panels are developed. The lease is a monetary gain to the community while the energy is cleaner for society to consume and will reduce the carbon footprint.

The panels are mounted to steel poles that are excavated or pounded into the ground depending on the site location. The area at the treatment facility is all gravel so the pipes will just be placed into the ground. The arrays are virtually maintenance free so that no one needs to be in the fields on a daily basis. They will be monitored off site. This is an ideally suited location on 16 square miles of reservoir land.

The Agency noted that it had a number of environmental water quality concerns such as distance from the reservoir and wetlands, heat impact on adjacent wetlands, stormwater runoff, and erosion.

Representatives from SolarCity explained that the site was selected because very little vegetation needs to be removed to allow placement of the panels. Existing trees are kept trimmed because of power lines from the Buddington Road substation and this will cut down on sun blocking. The units are fixed with no need for gear oils or lubrication. Only inert products such as glass might fall off the panels so there will be very little impact to the ecology. The location is virtually flat providing no erosion problems. Warm season grasses grow there now and will continue to grow post construction.

With regard to heat expectations on adjacent wetlands, the belief is there will be no impact. Due to the angle of the panels, a majority of the energy will be utilized by the arrays. They will not be hot to the touch and water will sheet off quickly enough so that this will not be a significant source of increasing water temperature.

The Agency also had concerns about the distances from the arrays to vernal pools on the site.

SolarCity representatives explained the shrub mitigation plantings. Trees and shrubs will be planted to enhance the southern area which is barren because of the substation.

Staff noted that comments are due to the Siting Council by November 13, 2015. Additional concerns not addressed tonight should be put in comments to the Council so they can be addressed.

The Agency indicated that their first concern is the distance of the panels from the reservoir and the wetlands. Their secondary concern is the amount of heat that will be shed from the units which can be mitigated by increasing the distance.

2. Report of Chair – None
3. Report of Staff

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Staff noted that the Agency's next meeting is Wednesday, November 18, 2015 because Veteran's Day falls on the second Wednesday this year.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 7:53 p.m.

Barbara Block, Secretary
Inland Wetland Agency

Prepared by Lynda Galetta
Office Assistant II