



Planning Board – Town of Spencer  
*Minutes*  
Planning Board Meeting  
Tuesday April 16, 2013 at 7:00 PM  
McCourt Social Hall  
Memorial Town Hall

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**Planning Board Members Present:** Chair James Whalen, Shirley Shiver, Mary Stolarczyk, Robert Ceppi, Ralph DiChiara and Jonathan Viner.

**Planning Board Members Absent:** None

**Staff Present:** Michelle Buck, Town Planner and Brynn Johnson, ODIS Jr. Clerk

Mr. Whalen opens the meeting at 7:00pm.

Public Hearing – Major Site Plan Review, Applicant: Old Wardour Holdings, LLC. Owner: Michael Ballou. Project Location: 22 Treadwell Drive. The Site Plan Review application is for the construction of a ground-mounted solar facility. The property is located within the Rural Residential Zoning District. Michael Loin of Bertin Engineering is present to represent this project.

Mr. Whalen opens the Public Hearing at 7:02pm

Mr. Loin explains the name of the applicant has changed. It was Carisbrooke Holdings when they filed this application but have since changed their name to Old Wardour Holdings LLC. This is going to be a 6 MW solar facility; 2.8 MW will be on the Spencer side and 3.2 MW on the East Brookfield side. In East Brookfield to the west of this project there is a previously-approved solar facility on the old Treadwell gravel pit.

This site is the last property on Treadwell Drive. Currently there are portions of woods, fields and gravel driveways. There is also a slaughter house/butcher shop located on the property with multiple small storage buildings such as barns and sheds.

They had New England Environmental locate the wetlands and they have been in front of the Conservation Commission. Conservation did have some items they wanted addressed such as wetlands buffers. They are working on a revised plan that will show these changes. Under the panels they will plant a seed mix that was developed specifically for solar farms.

The fence will be 6 foot high black vinyl-coated chain-link, 6 inches off the ground so small animals can pass under it. The gate will match the fence. There will be no barbed wire. He knows deer can jump that high but hopes this will be enough to keep them out. Deer have been known to damage panels.

There will be a lock box at the end of Treadwell Drive with keys in it for police and fire in case of an emergency. They will also have access from the East Brookfield side.

The power will all be feed underground and go directly to a sub-station that is being built on the East Brookfield side.

During construction they will have a staging area on the East Brookfield side for loading and unloading heavy equipment. This will help limit construction impacts on abutters. After construction there is very little traffic. They only anticipate a pick-up truck coming to the site once a week for routine maintenance. In the summer a crew may come by to wash the panels or cut the grass.

The entrances will have motion sensors facing into the site. There will be a motion light that will come on for a person, car or large animal. The motion lights should not turn on for a small animal. The reason for the motion lights is to give a small amount for light to the closed circuit cameras.

There is an area between an abutting home on Treadwell Drive and the array where trees are sparse so they plan to make 10 feet earthen berm with trees planted on top. They want it to look green and natural. This will screen the view from that home.

The panels will be on a double racking system. Mr. Loin shows the Board photos of the racking system and the inverters.

Mr. Whalen asks what the total power out-put of this project including the East Brookfield side. Mr. Loin says it will be about 12 MW.

Mr. Whalen asks the public if they have any questions.

Cliff Huston of 6 Cornfield Road asks how tall the panels will be. Mr. Loin says the bottom of the panels will be 2 feet off the finished grade; the top will be roughly 8 feet high.

Mr. Huston asks if the berm off Treadwell Drive is for screening of views or noise. Mr. Loin says both. It's to screen the view but it will also help with any noise. The transformers make a low humming sound. If you're standing 3 ft from the transformer the noise level is 60 decibels. However from the nearest home the sound would only be 10 decibels during the day. A normal car driving by has a sound level of 35 decibels. Mr. Loin says the ZBA recommended the transformers be moved further away from abutters. As of now the transformer is 200 ft away from abutters. They can move it about 80 ft making it about 280 ft away from the nearest abutter.

Mr. DiChiara agrees the transformers should be moved as far away from abutters as possible. Mr. Loin shows on the plans where the transformers will be moved to.

Ms. Shiver asks if these transformers are the same as the ones you can see on some streets. Mr. Loin says yes there are very similar. She asks if the decibels are the same. Mr. Loin is unsure, but will look into it. Ms. Shiver asks if the sound is steady all day. Mr. Loin says yes it's a steady low hum all day but there is not sound at night.

Mr. DiChiara asks if the tower on the East Brookfield side is the high tension line. Mr. Loin says yes.

Ms. Audrey Roberts of 18 Treadwell Drive says her house is the house that is nearest to this site and the berm. Ms. Roberts would like to know more about the berm. Mr. Loin explains it will be a 10 ft high earthen berm with trees on the top and green vegetation on the sides to screen her view of the panels. They will use plants and trees that blend naturally with the surroundings.

Ms. Roberts's questions what this solar facility is going to do to her home value. Mr. Loin says he is unsure if there have been any studies on home values near solar facilities. He feels this shouldn't affect her home value negatively because the berm will create a visual buffer.

Mr. Whalen asks what the economic value of this solar farm will be to Spencer. Mr. Loin explains there will be an agreement worked out with the assessor's office.

Mr. Whalen asks who the power will be going to. Mr. Loin says it's going to Nation Grid, but a company or municipality can buy the green energy credits.

Ms. Shiver asks if they are willing to work with the abutters if they are unhappy with the berm. Mr. Loin says yes they can.

Mr. DiChiara asks how far away from the transformers would you have to go to not hear anything. Mr. Loin is unsure. Mr. DiChiara expresses concern that the constant day time low level humming may annoy abutters.

Ms. Buck asked for more detail in the narrative and a community/development impact statement.

Ms. Buck asks where vehicles will be parked during construction. Mr. Loin says in near where the slaughter house was will be the best area for staging.

Ms. Buck questions why there is a break in the fence near the wetlands. Mr. Loin says they don't think anyone would walk through the wetlands to get to the panels, but they are willing to fence it in if the Board wants.

Mr. Viner asks if there will be a vegetative buffer at the property line. Mr. Loin says they are clearing to the property line they are only leaving the big trees within 5-6 feet of the property line. Mr. Viner feels some kind of vegetative buffer should be left. Mr. Loin says the back area of the site abuts the State Forest. The only homes that would see the panels will have the berm to screen their view.

Mr. DiChiara asks what they are doing on the East Brookfield side to screen abutter views. Mr. Loin is unsure of what the East Brookfield will require, but they do have one abutter on Harrington Street that will need screening.

The Board discusses Graves comments and asks that all comments be addressed. Mr. Loin says they are working on addressing all they comments now. They are also working to address all of the Conservation Commission issues.

Mr. Whalen asks when and why the company changed their name. Mr. Loin says it changed one or two days after they submitted the application. He doesn't know all the details of why they changed their name but it has something to do with the tie-in with National Grid.

Mr. DiChiara asks what the homeowners on the on the eastern side will see when they look to the west. Does the land slope down or are they going to be looking up at rows and rows of over 900 panels. Mr. Loin says the grade is level then back up near where the slaughter house is now.

Mr. DiChiara asks Ms. Roberts if she has any concerns as her house is directly abutting this site.

Ms. Roberts expresses concern for what this will do to her well water. She was concerned that water will run off of the berm and into her yard. She says her lot already has high groundwater. Mr. Loin says because of the way the land slopes the water in flow way from her property.

Mr. Whalen asks if there are any other questions or comments. There are none.

**Motion:** Mr. Shiver makes a motion to continue the hearing to May 21, 2013 at 7:30pm

Ms. Stolarczyk seconds the motion.

**Vote:** 6-0 in favor

**Approval of Minutes-** Minutes from 2/19/2013

Motion: Ms. Shiver makes a motion to approve the minutes for 2/19/2013. Ms. Stolarczyk seconds the motion.

Vote: 6-0 in favor

**Board Discussion-** Mr. DiChiara is disappointed with 115 Wilson Street solar farm. He states for the record he owes the residents of Paxton Road an apology. If he had known it was going to look the way it does he would never have voted to approve it. He feels it really subtracts from the aesthetic beauty and value of the abutting homes. He is not against alterative energy in any way but he wishes he had done more research on how it was going to look. For future solar projects he will likely only vote to approve if they have a large buffer and are completely out of view from residential homes. Ms. Stolarczyk agrees.

Mr. Whalen adds it looks as though in some places they cut trees where trees did not need to be cut. The panels are very close to some of the abutter properties on Paxton Road. When he was on Paxton Road (in the driveway of abutters) he could clearly see all the details of the solar panel both in and out of the sun light.

There is much discussion on how to improve future solar projects in Spencer.

**Adjournment:** With no further discussion the meeting is adjourned at 8:18 pm.

**Submitted by:** Brynn Johnson, Jr. Clerk *Brynn Johnson*  
**Approved by the Planning Board on:** 6/18/2013

**List of Documents used on April 16, 2013**

Items sent to Planning Board prior to Meeting:

- Agenda
- Memo to Board from Ms. Buck dated 4/11/2013
- Application and Plans for 22 Treadwell Drive
- Letter from applicant dated 3/11/2013

Items submitted to Planning Board at meeting:

- None