

Minutes of the Chatham County Environmental Advisory Committee (ERAC) Meeting, June 9, 2016

Location:

Performance Building Conference Room

Attendees:

Ray Bode, Jerry Cole, Mary Beth Koza, Dave Mattison, Terry Schmidt, Sherri Stuewer, Elaine Chiosso, Luke Groff, Graham Swift

Absentees:

Vic D'Amato, Fran DiGiano

Guests:

Diana Hales, Chatham County Board of Commissioners Liaison to ERAC; Eric Desmarais, ENERPARC

Staff:

Dan LaMontagne, Chatham County Public Works Director; Brian Burkhart, Chatham County Environmental Director

Call to Order:

- Chairman, Terry Schmidt, called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM to follow the published Agenda

1. Introductions of those in attendance

2. Recording Secretary:

- Graham Swift was designated by the Chairman

3. Approval of Minutes of the April 14, 2016 Meeting:

- Jerry Cole moved for acceptance of the minutes as written and Luke Groff seconded the motion which carried unanimously.

4. Public Input:

- No public present.
- Motion by Graham Swift to adjourn ERAC and reconvene as the Watershed Review Board (WRB) seconded by Sherri Stuewer carried unanimously.
- Review of request by ENERPARC Solar Development LLC for a text amendment to the Chatham County Watershed Protection Ordinance to add the use of Solar Farms to Attachment A of permitted uses. Eric Desmarais was present at the meeting as the ENERPAC representative.

Points on the placement of the solar farm that came under discussion, considered by ENERPAC to be of minimum impact, included:

- The use of galvanized piers to be implanted in the ground to support the solar panels
- A few small foundations for mounting transformers
- The site will still have natural vegetation growth under and around the solar panels which should minimize water runoff from the panels
- After construction only a few vehicles will access the site on an annual basis to carry out maintenance, mowing, trimming, and washing panels with WATER (only), as needed. It was stated that no surfactants are needed for washing the panels. A gravel road will be laid for access of these vehicles.
- The solar photovoltaic panels will be state of the art, crystalline silica based, which do not contain hazardous chemicals.
- Solar farms operate at low voltage, typically 1000 volts to the point where the voltage is stepped up to match utility lines.

Jerry Cole raised issues with the unknown long term environmental safety affects of the galvanized piers, expressing concern that zinc leachate could conceivably contaminate ground water. Even though these piers and other galvanized items are used widely in solar farms and other installations, they should not be blithely considered as safe and we should be maintaining an eye on literature for possible information to the contrary.

Elaine Chiosso related the leachate potential to other environmental chemical contaminants and also raised the issue of how much land clearance would be necessary or should be tolerated for solar farm sites.

Ray Bode and Mary Beth both suggested limits, 12% to 24 % of total area, for deforestation allowed to implement solar farms.

After much discussion on the ENERPAC request, it was agreed, based on several motions and amendments, that the WRB should make the following recommendations and changes to the WRB text ordinance pertinent to the project and solar farms in general. The final motion, indicated below, by Sherri Stuewer seconded by Elaine Chiosso carried by an 8 to 1 vote, Jerry Cole casting the negative

Solar Farms that:

1. Disturb tree cover less than the built-upon area percentage for the corresponding watershed (i.e., Solar Farms in WS-III can disturb less than 12% of existing tree cover)
2. Use only crystalline silica photovoltaic solar panels

Given the discussions and conclusions needed to accommodate Solar Panels in permitted uses, it was generally agreed that the current list of permitted uses in the subject ordinance should be reviewed and suggestions made for how we might be better able to address future projects that are not covered by the current permitted uses. Sherri Stuewer was asked by Terry Schmidt to work with Jerry Cole and Ray Bode as a subcommittee to tackle this issue, with Dan LaMontagne providing input and support.

The WRB was disbanded and the ERAC restarted based on Mary Beth Koza's motion which was seconded by Elaine Chiosso and carried unanimously

6. Updates from County Staff:

- Dan will move forward to recommend the reappointments of Graham Swift, Sherri Stuewer and Fran DiGiano whose terms are expiring.

Legislation update:

- Buffers pending State action and clarification, no change from last meeting.
- Coal Ash air quality monitoring indicates low particulates in latest testing, leachate analysis indicates Cr, Pb, Ca, Mn all in acceptable ranges.
- Next year's budget for testing is based on 4 air and 4 groundwater samplings

7. Announcements and Updates:

Comprehensive plan status:

- Terry Schmidt indicated 3 public meetings coming up, June 21, 22, 23 all are posted on the website.

Elaine Chiosso raised the issue of Briar Chapel's proposal for higher density home sites. Commissioner Hanes indicated that there would be a public hearing in July. The planning board will be involved and ERAC possibly.

Elaine also raised the issue of industrial contamination of the Haw River and whether we should be involved. It was agreed that the academics involved should be invited to a future meeting, and Elaine was so appointed to follow this through.

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 on a motion by Jerry Cole seconded by Ray Bode.

NEXT MEETING JULY 14, 6:30 PM, PERFORMANCE BUILDING CONFERENCE ROOM

Respectfully,

Graham Swift

