

Holyoke Conservation Commission Minutes 6/11/2020 (Remote via Zoom)

Conservation Commission Members Present: Michael Dodge (Chairperson), Price Armstrong, Mary Moriarty, Bernice Bowler, Jeffery Horan, Rosemary Arnold

Staff Present: Yoni Glogower (Conservation Director)

Members of the public present: Briony Angus, Katy Wilkins, Steve Bern

1) Call to Order

Chairperson Dodge formally called the Public Meeting to order at 6:15

2) Public Hearing – Request for Certificate of Compliance (DEP 186-0274)

Applicant: Eversource Energy c/o Jonathan Roberge

Representative: Katy Wilkins, Tighe & Bond Engineering

Location: 200 Northampton St. (227-00-005)

Description: Work within 200' Riverfront Area and Bordering Land Subject to Flooding

Katy Wilkins presented the project on behalf of the Applicant. She explained that the project was approved to build a tele-communications line. The correct erosion controls were put in place and approved by the former Conservation Director on behalf of the Commission. The project was put on hold and eventually cancelled because a more recent project to install an OPGW line had been approved that would satisfy the needs of the applicant. No work had been done other than installation of sediment erosion controls, now removed. The Applicant requested a Certificate of Compliance to close out the project and remove the Order of Conditions from the Deed.

No questions were asked by the members of the Commission or the general public.

The Commission voted unanimously to approve and issue the Certificate of Compliance for the project (DEP 186-0274) as requested.

3) Pre-Permitting Consultation

Applicant: Holyoke BESS, LLC

Representative: Briony Angus, Tighe & Bond Engineering

Location: Canal St. ROW(049-01-008, 009, 010)

Description: Work within the buffer zone of the banks of the Second Canal

Director Glogower updated the Commission on the history of discussions related to this project. He and Briony Angus had been in touch about permitting requirements for work within the 50 foot Buffer Zone of a section of the Canal that had been filled in and reclassified as a Bordering Vegetated Wetland. It was decided that bringing the project before the full Commission informally before submittal would be the best way forward.

Briony Angus presented the project on behalf of the applicant with preliminary diagrams shared with the Commission and members of the public. The project as presented is similar to another previously

permitted battery storage setup, located on a long linear parcel on Water Street owned by Holyoke Gas and Electric. They stated the intention of submitting a full Notice of Intent application with alternatives analysis. The project consists of three large battery storage containers raised on foundation footings and two converter/transformer boxes with an estimated less than 2000 s.f. of added impervious surface. Discussion of how the battery containers would be raised off the ground by 12-18 inches.

Briony Angus proposed that the purpose of the project itself be considered its own mitigation, because of its positive contribution to sustainable energy use. Members of the Commission (Armstrong, Dodge) raised concerns about this argument, since the positive outcomes of battery storage for renewable energy do not relate directly to issues of water quality. They requested a more compelling argument and discussion of alternatives (including financial impacts) be made to consider issuing a Variance, to be consistent with other similar projects approved near the canals in Holyoke. She agreed to a backup plan where offsite compensatory mitigation plantings.

Commissioner Moriarty raised the question of what will happen to the battery storage once it has become obsolete, and that the responsibility for decommissioning be clearly stated within the application materials. She also asked about contingencies to be put in place in case of fire. The representative agreed to include decommissioning in the Notice of Intent, and noted the presence of a public hydrant near the site. The project Applicant, Steve Bern, gave information about BESS LLC. and its status as a non-profit entity promoting renewable energy project, with Citizen Energy doing the work on its behalf. BESS would be responsible for continued maintenance and eventual decommissioning.

Chairperson Dodge suggested that tree planting be made a part of the mitigation efforts, and a focus on erosion and sediment controls. Discussion on existing site conditions, that the entire site is characterized by a vegetated/gravel surface but that the stated impervious surface would be in addition to these conditions. A discussion about filing fees and other administrative details.

4) Enforcement Updates: 35 Reservation Road, Mountain Road, Gloutak, MA-141

Commissioner Glogower gave updates on ongoing enforcement efforts. A meeting with the homeowner at 35 Reservation Road yielded parameters for restoration work, to be submitted to the Commission at a later meeting for approval, as determined at the previous public meeting.

Conservation Director Glogower and Commissioner Arnold had walked the Gloutak property with Kestrel Land Trust staff to document property markers and evidence of illegal ATV usage/likely points of entry. Steps to follow up include posting signs and neighborhood outreach.

Commissioner Horan and Conservation Director Glogower visited the MA-141 property behind the Holyoke Animal Hospital with the property owner to document brush piling. It was determined that the placement of brush had stopped following a letter that had been written to a neighbor, but that the Commission would follow up later if it continued.

5. Mail/ other items not reasonably anticipated by the Chair

Commissioner Arnold gave background on reports of tree clearing and fire pit usage at a parcel on Mountain Road. The Commission discussed whether to send a letter to the landowner by way of following up.

The Commission voted unanimously to direct the Conservation Director to purchase a Zoom account solely for use of the Conservation Commission.

6.Adjourn

The Commission formally voted to close the Public Meeting at 7:47 PM.

These minutes were prepared by Yoni Glogower on behalf of the Holyoke Conservation Commission.