

ELMS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING
PATUXENT BUILDING * LEONARDTOWN, MD
11:00 A.M. JANUARY 5, 2011
Minutes

Members present were Derick Berlage, Brad Clements, David Heilmeier, David Gailey, Gayle Moreland on behalf of Pete Dunbar, Phil Rollins, Steve Riley, and Ray Cameron.

Members absent were Dr. Robert Paul.

Others present were Margarita Rochow, Elms Environmental Center; Todd Dove, Howlin Concrete; Jason Babcock, The Enterprise; Kelly Palmer, LUGM Staff; Leroy Mattingly, Navy; Miles Primrose, DNR; Laura Clarke, LSA; Karen Everett, SMC; Carrie Mason, The Bay Net; Guy Leonard, County Times; Bob Schaller, DECD; Donna Sasscer, DECD; Marianne Chapman, Citizen; and Hans Welch, DECD.

Mr. Berlage called the meeting to order at 11:00 a.m. and asked for additions or amendments to the agenda.

I. Approval of Minutes – 10/20/10

A motion was made and seconded to approve the minutes of 10/20/10 as amended. The motion passed without opposition.

II. New Business

a. Discussion of Proposed Solar Photovoltaic Generating Facility

Mr. Berlage stated the purpose of this meeting is to inform the members of a proposal to place a solar photovoltaic generating facility on a portion of the Elms Property. Mr. Berlage asked that Miles Primrose of the Department of Natural Resources Power Plant Research Program to brief the committee on the proposed facility.

Mr. Primrose gave a brief historic overview of the property stating the site was purchased by DNR in 1974 as a potential site for the construction of an electrical generating power plant. Mr. Primrose stated since the purchase St. Mary's County has entered into a lease agreement with DNR for 476 acres of the property for use as a county park and an environmental education center. The balance of the property is maintained as a public hunting and recreation area.

Mr. Primrose stated over the past summer the Power Plant Assessment Division received a proposal from a developer interested in leasing approximately 20 acres of the Elms property for the construction of a 4 MW solar photovoltaic electrical generating facility. The facility would consist of approximately 16,000 3'x6' photovoltaic panels mounted on a framing system which is currently being designed. A small prefabricated structure, approximately 8'x10', will house the control equipment. The entire facility would be fenced. Day to day monitoring of the facility would be done remotely, with periodic onsite maintenance and inspection. The developer is currently in negotiations with the local electric utility (Southern Maryland Electric Coop) for grid tie-in and a power purchase agreement. The project would be subject to the Public Service Commission's Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity (CPCN) process that includes opportunities for public input and comment. The developer would submit the CPCN application upon finalizing a lease agreement with DNR.

Additionally, Mr. Primrose stated the developer has expressed a strong interest for incorporating an educational component into the project. This could be through signage, facility tours, and/or equipment to provide solar power to the education center.

Mr. Primrose stated the internal DNR Project Review will be completed when comments from the Executive staff are received by the DNR Public Lands Division. Mr. Primrose state to date, the project has been reviewed and commented on internally at DNR by Forestry, and Wildlife and Heritage, and externally by the Department of Planning. The DNR Executive staff would like to see local government support for the project prior to making any decisions. If the project is supported by the Executive staff, DNR Public Lands will submit the project to the State Clearing House for comments. During the 45 to 60 day Clearing House review process, the developer will be compiling and submitting to DNR the information necessary for lease negotiations.

Mr. Primrose stated the majority of the 20 acres proposed for development is currently open ground surrounding several abandoned structures that are slated for demolition. Mr. Primrose stated there is no intrusion into the Chesapeake Bay Critical Areas; there are no mapped wetlands on the site, and there were no identified rare,

threatened or endangered species or habitats. Approximately 10 acres of forest clearing is proposed, and forest mitigation for this clearing, as well as the balance of the development area will be required. Mr. Primrose stated stormwater is planned to be infiltrated on site. The Department of Planning noted significant potential for cultural artifacts, thus Phase I archeological study will be required at a minimum. The balance of the DNR controlled land will remain available for hunting and recreation. Additional conditions and mitigation may be required as outcomes of the CPCN process.

Mr. Primrose stated the developer has to have a lease agreement prior to moving forward with financing and submitting application to the Public Service Commission. Assuming all this moves forward CPCN is applied for, it would probably be a minimum of six (6) months before any groundbreaking took place.

Mr. Berlage stated he hopes the Elms Advisory Committee can help encourage the broadest possible input from the St. Mary's County citizens on this proposal and advise the County Commissioners whether or not they should take a position on this issue. Mr. Berlage asked if there would be a public hearing as part of this process. Mr. Primrose stated the Public Service Commission's procedures require a public hearing. Mr. Berlage asked where this hearing will be held. Mr. Primrose stated the public hearing would be held in St. Mary's County. Mr. Berlage asked if DNR will at some point make a recommendation to the Public Service Commission as to whether the proposal should be accepted or not. Mr. Primrose stated DNR does not necessarily provide a recommendation, but rather look at the information the developer provides. Mr. Berlage asked for a timetable as to the public hearing being held. Mr. Primrose stated once the application goes before the Public Service Commission there is several months allowed for the environmental review and to receive comments from other agencies, etcetera. Mr. Primrose stated public input would be received prior to any activity taking place on the site. Mr. Berlage asked where the public comments should be sent. Mr. Primrose stated there would be a hearing examiner. Mr. Berlage asked that Mr. Primrose provide this information to the County and the Advisory Board as soon as possible so it can be placed on the County website.

Mr. Riley asked if a sketch of the proposed building has been provided. Mr. Riley explained so of the neighbors are concerned and wish to know what they are going to be looking at every day. Mr. Primrose stated there is not currently a building scale or sketch however the facility will essentially be a small pre-fabricated control building with all solar panels fixed to a framing system facing south.

Mr. Clements clarified that once the developer applies for the CPCN, CPCN will be the agency to hold the public hearing. Mr. Primrose stated yes. Mr. Primrose stated he will keep the Advisory Committee up to dated on the process as we move along.

Mr. Gailey asked if the developer would be removing all of the abandoned buildings as part of their site development and clearing. Mr. Primrose stated this has yet to be determined; we are hoping to have this done prior to the developer moving forward however the developer has indicated that he would be willing to raze the buildings himself. Mr. Heilmier asked if it would be possible to use gravel on the site rather than having a grassy area. Mr. Primrose stated there will need to be quite a bit of grassy area to handle the stormwater management; however some gravel may be necessary for proper infiltration.

Mr. Babcock of The Enterprise asked if there are any other solar generating facilities in the State or if this will be the first of its kind. Mr. Primrose stated not only is this facility the first of its kind but it is the first solar utility scale within the State of Maryland.

Mr. Schaller asked if having this facility on the site will make the site more appealing to other power developers. Mr. Schaller stated the lack of infrastructure at the Elms site has been an issue in the past. Mr. Primrose stated he is unsure; the existing infrastructure will be able to handle the solar facility but not much more.

Mr. Leonard of The County Times asked if St. Mary's County would directly benefit from the power production at this solar plant or would it be put on the grid for the entire state? Mr. Primrose stated the solar power would go into the grid therefore it would be used anywhere the SMECO distribution grid provides power. Mr. Leonard asked if the developers name can be released at this time. Mr. Primrose stated no, not at this time.

Mr. Berlage stated the Advisory Committee will work with Mr. Primrose to gather as much information about the project as possible so it can be posted on the County website and that the Committee meets again in the next three weeks to discuss the information and begin deliberating our position on the project. Mr. Berlage asked that Ms. Stuckert coordinate and schedule another meeting within the next three weeks. Ms. Stuckert agreed.

III. Unfinished Business

None

IV. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 11:50 a.m.