

DATE: June 1, 2010
TO: Town of Moretown Select Board
FROM: Moretown Planning Commission: Don LaRocca, Lucinda Newman, Dan Lynch, Jonathan Siegel, Gene Kaslow and Rube Scharges
RE: Encore Redevelopment Solar Panel Proposal

The Moretown Planning Commission (PC) would like the opportunity to respond to emails circulated by David Van Deusen beginning May 27 regarding the issue of a proposed solar installation on town land.

The PC believes that in the appropriate situation & location, and if the business model makes sense, there could be significant benefit and value to having an alternative energy project materialize. Furthermore, we would like to explore said project with the concerted efforts of Planning Commission, Energy Group and Select Board. However, the PC has specific concerns and questions about the project proposed by Encore Redevelopment.

1. Does spending \$200k require voter approval which will then require at least a 30-day warning plus due process? Does voter approval also require a public informational hearing prior to any vote?
2. If reading this correctly, ten per cent of the Town's energy needs is a relatively low amount. In 2009 the Town Office, Library, Town Hall, Fire Station and Garage spent \$5k on electricity, total, combined. Debbie Lesure, the principal, reported that the school spent about \$15k on electricity in FY '08'09 and they budgeted \$21k for FY '09'10, but they now expect to come in under budget for this FY ending June 30. So the combined yearly electric expense for Town and school is about \$20-25k, 10% of which is \$2,500 or less, or about one sixth of a cent on the tax rate = 0.00156. Furthermore, \$2,500 x 10 years = \$25,000 if the units are working at their optimum. Paying \$200,000 in 10 years to save the Town \$25,000 does not appear to be a sound return.
3. What kind of revenue could be generated by a substantial solar project? Is maintenance figured into this? The landfill dollars are a finite amount. Charged by the State of Vermont, the Planning Commission has worked diligently on developing a Capitol Budget so that the landfill money is already allocated and figured into the budget. If we use it to buy anything additional, the taxes will need to go up, or the reserve fund deposits go down. For example, \$200k equals 12.5 on the tax rate, or \$125 per 100k of assessed property value.
4. This will not be the last opportunity for federal, state or partner contribution to an alternative energy Town project. The currently proposed fixed panels are not state of the art by today's standards, as they do not track the sun's arc. If the Town commits to spending \$200k, in ten years, it will be on what will then be ten-year-old technology. Encore Redevelopment will make their money now, with Federal grants, then Moretown would come in late to the deal and buy them out, leaving the Town to maintain older equipment which probably has about a 20 year total life span. The Town will ultimately face having to clean up and dispose of the equipment when it becomes unreliable or obsolete.
5. We fear that the technical and political logistics are more complicated than what is revealed in this proposal. For some examples, where and how does Encore Redevelopment propose to "tap into the grid at the nearest point?" Are there foreseeable problems siting this project on the school's leach field? (There was a major issue finding a spot and getting it approved when the school was renovated in the 1990's. There is no other site for septic, and the school is restricted now as to what it can do in the kitchen because of this.)

Beyond this letter and these basic areas of concern, the PC would like the opportunity to meet directly with the SB to mutually and agreeably understand even the basic Town procedure and protocol to engage in such a project -- as well as understand how the whole SB stands on this issue. Realistically this will take longer to schedule and settle than the limited deadline of June 4. For these aforementioned concerns plus the unrealistic timeline for decision, the PC does not support this specific proposal but looks forward to coordinating an alternative energy project proposal with the SB and the Energy Group in the future.