



**Sustainability, Energy
& Resiliency Committee**
City of Salem, MA

The Salem Sustainability, Energy, and Resiliency Committee held a public meeting on
Wednesday, August 25 2021 at 6:30 PM via remote participation.

In Attendance

Board Members:

Chair John Hayes
Vice Chair Jeff Cohen
Doug Bowker

Phil Koch
Chris Cantone
Gail Kubik

Rick Nye
Meg Riccardi, City Council
liaison

Not in Attendance:

City Staff:

Jenna Ide, Director, Sustainability and Resiliency Department & Capital Projects
Esmeralda Bisono, and Resiliency Department
Manager, Sustainability (recorder)

Public:

Alan Hanscom, SATV (recording)
Screen Names:

Introductions

Public Comment (limited to one minute per person, anything under SERC jurisdiction but not related to other Agenda items)

Review & Approve Meeting Minutes – July 28, 2021

A motion to approve the minutes, after the incorporation of edits to be submitted to Stacy Kilb no later than 12:00 PM Monday, August 30th, and pending public comments, is made by Jeff Cohen, seconded by Doug Bowker, and passes 6–0.

John Hayes Yes
Jeff Cohen Yes
Gail Kubik Yes
Phil Koch Yes
Rick Nye Yes
Doug Bowker Yes



Guest Speaker: Darleen Melis (Chair of City Tree Commission) and Patti Morsillo (City Councilor) speak about solar and trees Solar Ordinance in Salem

Patti Morsillo – The City has begun writing a solar ordinance that is focused on zoning, with much to do with tree buffers and the processes that large solar developers would need to go through.

- The State law specifies that solar can go anywhere regardless of zoning, so this City ordinance would enact a few rules to make these large projects better for the neighborhoods.
- The project on Swampscott Road is not moving forward because of a conservation restriction on the land/deed, which took some time for local activists to find.
- Projects like this are going to happen again. Solar is a great thing for the community, especially if it benefits low-income communities like this project proposed, but the main problem with this project was the location in which mature trees and large tree coverage were to be taken down. There was a lot of pushback to this online and on social media. Per State law at this moment, solar projects are able to move forward regardless of location.
- There needs to be a wider discussion in the City about the tradeoffs and how to improve existing or upcoming ordinances to guide energy projects. Ideas include: a better tree protection ordinance that includes a survey of the land to understand tree coverage, tree age, and land owners/leasers (solar providers) pay into a tree fund (possibly into the same neighborhood that the project is in). There are several communities that have tree protection ordinances, requiring a tree inspection before removal.

Jeff Cohen – We should be skeptical of what companies say about the benefits of solar on a private development. Solar on a private development such as this project would be a great benefit to private developers, and not as much to the community at large.

- Regarding the solar ordinance: some committee members began writing a solar ordinance. We looked at over 300 examples of solar ordinances in other communities,



and we had many conversations about the benefits in a city like Salem. We may be able to offer help on the current drafted solar ordinance.

- Patti Morsillo: It is planned that SERC will get a copy of the ordinance for review and comment.

John Hayes – City of Cambridge had a tree ordinance and in Feb 2019, they extended the ordinance to cover trees on private property. There must be a permit process for certain trees to be removed. Recommended for the City and others to review. John will send the copy of the ordinance to SERC via email.

Darleen Melis – The Tree Commission is turning two years old in September after the Tree Ordinance was enacted. Only 4+ units and commercial properties are listed on the tree ordinance; meaning that tree removal would require a permit and review with the tree warden. There has been a great deal of tree removal in Salem and lack of tree maintenance. We are losing our canopy to age, and the willingness of the populace to grow trees in their backyard is not high. There are currently a few programs to increase the number of trees in the City (Greening of the Gateway Cities and Century Tree). 186 planted in the Spring, 500 in the pipeline to be planted in the Fall.

- Regarding the solar project: Solar power is important and has many benefits. “The Large Tree Argument” document has information on the importance and value of each tree over its lifetime. Larger trees should be favored over smaller trees as it takes a long time to grow them. Locations like Highland Ave or Salem HS which is already lacking natural resources are great for adding solar panels. Darleen urges that the solar ordinance be pushed to protect tree canopy and non-destruction of living matter.

Phil Koch – Reiterating the need to be cautious/skeptical of developers’ intentions for private solar farms. It is common sense to not tear down trees for solar panels and to plant trees elsewhere. Both are extremely important and we need both. In addition, electric vehicle increase causes a dilemma because approximately 80% of Massachusetts’ electricity supply comes from fossil fuel plants.



Doug Bowker – Questions: Is it the case that solar, in theory, can be developed on top of wetlands? Does the State law supersede all other environmental laws?

- Patti: The State law only supersedes zoning laws, not conservation laws.

Jeff Cohen – The idea of “electrifying everything” is so that we can dictate the source of that power. The sooner we implement offshore wind, geothermal, solar, and other renewable energy sources, we will be able to switch the electricity supply over.

- Regarding Patti Morsillo’s presentation: It is very common for companies who do solar, especially ground-mounts, to create statistics that are misleading. For example: “If there are 100 solar panels on a property, it will reduce the amount of carbon by xxx amount.” This is always equated to a number of trees, as well, which can be very misleading to equate solar panels with trees.
- MA does not have a high rate of solar PV per capita as 1% of homes have solar. The incentives, that were terrific through 2015, have diminished greatly and we've lost about 30% of the jobs since then.
- Germany has over 6.5% of their electricity generated by residential solar. In addition to solar farms and commercial solar, which generate higher amounts of generated electricity, Germany is a leader in this. The U.S. and MA has a very long way to go using roofs, parking lots, and other creative locations to install which we have not been taking advantage of.

Gail Kubik – Completely agree with everyone's comments so far. When it comes to choosing between trees and solar panels, we always need to choose trees, because it takes a very long time for them to mature and grow.

Darleen Melis – Current tree ordinance states that public trees can be taken down by the tree warden. Health, public trees must have a hearing if such trees are to be removed. Growing conditions are not as great as they used to be, and there are many small trees around Salem now. But not many people are accustomed to taking care of trees, it’s “too much work.” Please take care of your trees, and donate to the Century Tree program.



Committee and guest speakers discuss examples of poorly managed percolation tests in Salem. John Hayes and Patti Morsillo suggest a Best Management Practices (BMP) and review process that the City should develop for the perc tests and other measures that may interfere with tree protection.

Jeff Cohen – The committee has reached out to Chris Burke and Rich Stafford. Chris will be coming on to the next meeting to discuss invasives and biodiversity. In some ways, this solar farm has led to many great discussions regarding our natural resources, especially for people who did not pay attention before.

Newly Released IPCC Report Review (John Hayes)

John Hayes prefers a larger audience for the IPCC Report Presentation. He will present during the September SERC meeting.

Next Meeting – Wednesday, September 22, 2021, from 6:30 – 8:00 P.M.

Adjournment

A motion to adjourn is made by Jeff Cohen, seconded by Doug Bowker, and passes 6–0.

John Hayes	Yes
Jeff Cohen	Yes
Gail Kubik	Yes
Phil Koch	Yes
Rick Nye	Yes
Doug Bowker	Yes

The meeting ends at 7:38 PM.

Know Your Rights Under the Open Meeting Law, M.G.L. c. 39 §23B, and City Ordinance Sections 2-2028 through 2-2033. Please contact Jenna Ide at jide@saalem.com or 978-619-5699 for more information.

