

May 31, 2021

Webster Solar Project Subcommittee
c/o David Hemenway, Chair
Town of Webster
945 Battle Street
Webster, NH 03303

Dear David;

The following letter summarizes my initial assessment of the proposed Olivewood Solar Farm Project in Webster, as based on our preliminary site work this last Tuesday, May 25th. As you recall, we were able to visit most of the proposed solar farm site, especially the anticipated wetland impact areas, and discuss with Olivewood employees their plans for avoidance and minimization of wetland impacts as well as possible mitigation as required by the state Department of Environmental Services.

This short report is intended to summarize some of the talking points we made as well as provide some recommendations for the Webster Solar Project Subcommittee going forward.

The site walk was attended by Dominic LeBel and Ben Chamberlain of Olivewood Energy, Dana Valleau and Tracy Sudhalter of TRC consulting group, James Long of GZA Environmental, Jacob Tinus of Burns & McDonnell Engineering, Dave Hemenway, Chair of the Webster Solar Project Subcommittee and member of the Webster Select Board, Chris Schadler from the Webster Conservation Commission, Dana Hadley, Webster Town Administrator, and Russ Tetrault of the Webster Planning Office. We drove into the southern lot of the proposed solar array area and surveyed most of the main wooded lot and wetland edges, then looked at the one wetland crossing area with anticipated wetland impacts along Deer Meadow Brook, and then finished with a walking survey of the lower section of the 'North Lot,' i.e. north of Deer Meadow Road.

In terms of proposed wetlands impacts, the primary areas included the crossing of Deer Meadow Brook in the southern lot and the crossing of a beaver flowage under the powerline in the northern lot. The existing access road across Deer Meadow Brook will be upgraded and a design culvert/underpass installed that will replace the triple culverts that are presently at the site. The angle of crossing and an overflow channel will likely require some creative design work in order to meet state standards under the current stream crossing rules (Env-Wt Chapter 900). The beaver pond outflow crossing follows an existing access road that has been flooded by beavers. This crossing will require

culverts and road upgrades that continue to allow for the adjacent beaver dam but discourages further blockage or flooding from their activities.



Above: access road over Deer Meadow Brook where three culverts will need replacing/removal

Other impacts are anticipated for rare & endangered species since there are NHB ‘hits’ for both Blanding’s turtles and black racers in the vicinity of the project site. According to Dom LeBel, much of the northern part of the north lot where there are several vernal pools and an extensive wetland system adjacent will be avoided in terms of panel construction. Although not required by the state or the town, adequate buffers to all wetlands will also be a part of the design plan. Best Management Practices (BMPs) will also be incorporated into the design for turtle passage underneath the perimeter fence that will provide the necessary security for the panel arrays.

In terms of the black racer, the one known site where habitat exists for the snake was reviewed in the field. The 1-2 acre patch lies just south of the Deer Brook wetland complex and just northeast of the proposed crossing area. After surveying the habitat it was discussed and suggested that this area be kept out of the construction of any panels and be included in the protection zone for the nearby wetland.



At right: black racer habitat in old sand pit

Other discussion points and/or recommendations that were brought up during the site walk include the following:

- In spite of the lack of an approved wetland ordinance with wetland setbacks, it was recommended to allow for 50 feet for smaller, lower functioning wetlands and 100 feet for recognized, high-functioning wetlands (e.g. Wetland 6, 8, & 23 on the GZA map)
- On-site wetland mitigation options were suggested, that included the following:
 - removal of fill and a blocked culvert along the lower section of Wetland 6
 - installation of a culvert at the old road crossing of lower Wetland 6 (near the town transfer station)
 - improving all of the wetland crossings along the existing access roads that generally have undersized, concrete culverts
 - use a natural bottom arch or box culvert for the Deer Meadow Brook crossing
 - create a vernal pool in the north lot where skidders have created a basin that currently holds temporary waters; encourage adjacent tree growth for shading
- Complete the initial tree clearing during the non-growing season to avoid any impacts to turtles, snakes, or woodland bats
- Add as a part of the lease agreement an additional perc for the town by including a right-of-first-refusal to purchase the lot if sold, as well as an option for the town to develop the site for a municipal water supply system
- Ensure that adequate environmental monitoring take place during construction to avoid impacts to any turtles that may be caught inside the initial silt fence enclosure
- Create and maintain a 20-foot wide fire break around the panel array areas that may be open for snowmobiles but not ATVs (this based on Dom's statement of intent regarding ongoing use of the properties).

Whereas there may have been other suggestions made, the above summarizes the salient points. In general, the southern section of the site appeared to be suitable for an extensive solar panel array, especially in light of the minimal wetlands, young or non-existent forest, and moderate grades with sandy soil. The northwest part of the northern lot appeared far less conducive owing to its steeper, rocky terrain and higher frequency of pocket swamps and vernal pools. Ample upland ground with flat terrain does exist in the southeast part of the northern lot, however, in spite of it being mapped entirely as wet in the GZA wetland mapping report. Recent clearing and preparation of the field in this area has made this part of the northern lot a 'turnkey' site for solar panels.

I would be happy to answer any questions or concerns with the above short report, either by phone, on zoom, or at your next in-person meeting.

Respectfully submitted;

Rick Van de Poll

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