

Bristol Community-owned Solar Proposal Background

Sally Burrell, energy committee chair.

At a Regional Planning Roundtable for energy committees I heard that Acorn Energy Co-op was helping towns with Community-owned Solar. Since shade and roof configuration in Bristol makes it hard for many people to own panels, I called Acorn Energy on Feb 6th to inquire. Their model sounded good to me, so at the Feb19th BEC meeting I let members know I'd be meeting with Acorn Energy on Feb 21 at the landfill.

1. Landfills are designated as preferred sites for solar by the state of VT.
2. Since closing our landfill, it's cost the town \$6-10k/year for post closure monitoring.
3. The Town would receive annual lease payments for solar built on the landfill x 25yrs.
4. The landfill site is not visible from any homes or public roads.
5. An extra penny per kWh is credited for electricity generated on landfill sites.

Acorn Energy Co-op felt the site was very suitable for an array. Acorn Energy invited Aegis Renewable Energy, their construction partner, to join us for another site visit on March 4th. Nils wanted to learn more about the Bristol Trail Network and see the back side more closely, so I invited Porter Knight to join us for a March 9th visit. We walked the section along the edge of the site. Porter shared the history of the landfill and the Bristol Trail Network.

A few days later, on Friday 13th, Gov Scott declared a State of Emergency, the world changed.

At the March 18th Zoom BEC meeting Acorn gave a presentation and described their unique model in more detail. Insightful Q and A followed and we felt it would be beneficial to pursue. We also learned that a federal and state change on July 1st would impact the affordability of the project. That meant a 45-day notice would need to be filed with the PUC after a non-binding thumbs up from the selectboard. We learned that permitting would take months, construction starting possibly in Nov 2020 or Spring 2021. Acorn Energy volunteer board members offer their time and expertise to towns at no cost. We agreed to ask for time on the next selectboard agenda. Acorn Energy presented to the selectboard at the March 30 meeting.

On April 9th Jamie Calzini sent an email to the Town Administrator sharing her frustration that a certified letter was the first she'd heard about a solar project in Bristol. Jamie and I discussed the situation by phone. I agreed that public outreach earlier would have been helpful and respectful. That stimulated outreach and questions and comments have been invited and collected on FPF and through emails; a Zoom Public Meeting was scheduled; energy committee webpage and town website were updated with NEAT videos and recordings, landfill aerial views, agendas and minutes, the Acorn Energy Solar Presentation and related materials. Selectboard discussions continued on April 13th and 23rd. Bristol Energy Committee further discussed the project at their April 15th meeting.