



City of Auburn, Maine

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To: Auburn Planning Board
From: Megan Norwood, City Planner II
Re: Solar Energy Generating Systems: Agricultural Zone
Date: December 10, 2019

I. OVERVIEW – The Planning Board is currently reviewing an ordinance for Solar Energy Generating Systems (SEGS) in the Industrial District. At the November 18th City Council meeting, the City Council requested the Planning Board also make a recommendation for an ordinance regulating SEGS in the Agricultural Zone. One of the main pushes for this is an interest in using landfills for Solar Installations as a “dual use.” Most, if not all, of the landfills are in the Ag-Zone.

At the December meeting, Staff will be gathering comments from the Planning Board on the draft SEGS ordinance proposed for the Industrial Zone and bringing back a more complete ordinance incorporating the Planning Board comments for the January meeting. After that meeting, a recommended ordinance will be brought forward to the City Council on SEGS in the Industrial District.

Where the Ag-Zone has a number of different land uses compared to the Industrial Zone, the Planning Board will want to establish different standards in an ordinance proposed for the Ag-Zone. The easiest way to go about this would be to use the ordinance already drafted for the Industrial District and tweak it to reflect land uses in the Ag-Zone. For example, there are more residential uses in the Ag-Zone compared to the Industrial Zone so the Planning Board may want to consider more stringent buffering requirements in the Ag-Zone.

Questions/Discussion Items for the Board to Consider:

1. Should SEGS be permitted in the Ag-Zone as long as they are less than one acre in total land area, should this threshold be reduced or increased?
2. Are there additional requirements that should apply to SEGS in the Ag-Zone under the proposed Sec. 60-1430 (SEGS permitted by Special Exception)?
 - a. Is a 30-foot buffer adequate for SEGS that abut residential uses in the Ag-Zone?
 - b. What about a 15-foot buffer for nonresidential uses?
 - c. What types of standards would the Planning Board like to see for the “by-right” types of projects? For example, SEGS on less than one acre where the power would not be used for the principal structure? Safety/buffering/access?
 - d. Should SEGS be exempt from lot coverage requirements in the Ag-Zone as well?
 - e. Are there any other maintenance items the Planning Board feels would be important for SEGS in the Ag-Zone?
 - f. What about standards to regulate visual impacts in addition to the standards proposed for buffering/landscaping?
 - g. Would the Planning Board want to see additional items included in an O&M Plan for a SEGS?
 - h. If SEGS are permitted in the Ag-Zone, should they be permitted “by-right” on landfills? Should there be separate standards to regulate them?
3. Would the Planning Board want to include any specific standards in the Ag-Zone?
 - a. For example, should solar arrays be limited to less than 10% of a farm’s tillable acreage?
 - b. Should they not be permitted on prime farm soil?

II. STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS –

Staff recommends the Planning Board review the ordinance and discuss the various questions/feedback items at the December Planning Board meeting keeping in mind the questions that were discussed regarding SEGS in the Industrial Zone. Planning Staff will bring back a more complete draft for the Ag-Zone at the January meeting.

Megan Norwood

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