

Milford planners looking ahead to solar farms

MILFORD — Planning staff are not aware of anyone looking to build a solar farm in town, but they are drafting a zoning amendment so Milford is prepared in case a proposal comes along.

While rooftop solar systems can be installed, a developer cannot build ground-mounted solar farms under current zoning, Town Planner Larry Dunkin said.

The amendment, which would need Town Meeting's approval, would allow ground-mounted solar projects generating at least 250 kilowatts in industrial and business park zones, according to a draft of the proposed amendment.

The Planning Board initially discussed the proposal last week.

"There seems to be a very large push for alternative energy solutions," board Chairman Patrick Kennelly said "I know wind and solar power have come to the forefront as viable energy solutions."

Kennelly said the board must consider what restrictions should be in the amendment to protect nearby homes or other property.

One provision in the current draft would dictate that large, ground-mounted solar projects have a maximum height of 10 feet.

With little undeveloped land, Milford doesn't seem like an attractive spot for a solar farm now, but Kennelly said it's difficult to predict what the market will be in the future

"I like the concept naturally of alternative energy solutions," he said. "With that said I always like to make sure the town is protected and ... residents are not displaced or inconvenienced when such a proposal comes forward."

With some solar proposals generating opposition from neighbors, officials from many towns have been exchanging ideas about how to handle solar projects, Building Commissioner John Erickson said.

In Holliston, residents this month spoke against a proposed 2-megawatt facility on Bullard Street. They worried the project would involve cutting down trees that are more than 100 years old along a scenic road and irreparably damage farmland.

"This is just a proactive way to deal with (any proposals)," Erickson said of Milford's amendment.

Planning Board member Lena McCarthy said she agreed with the need to ensure homes are protected from any negative effects of a solar project.

"We're all on the same page," McCarthy said. "I've seen (solar projects) around different areas. It's coming and that's why I think the Planning Board is reviewing it."

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