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## Martha's Vineyard Commission

### C.R. 4 - 2016 Bayes Norton Solar Farm

#### MVC Staff Report – 2016-03-31

## 1. DESCRIPTION

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- 1.1 Applicant:** W.H. Bennett, Inc., property is owned by Bayes Norton Farm, Inc.
- 1.2 Project Location:** 223 Edgartown-Vineyard Haven Road, Oak Bluffs Map 40 Lot 4 (21.5 acres)
- 1.3 Proposal:** Proposal to construct a 650 kW solar array with 2,040 solar panels covering approximately 2 acres (83,838 sf) on existing farm fields.
- **Zoning:** R-3; Residential. The Town of Oak Bluffs recently adopted a Zoning By-Law for Solar Energy Systems (Section 12).
  - The purpose of the By-Law is to “promote the use of solar energy by providing standards for the placement, design, construction, operation, monitoring, modification and removal of such installations that address public safety, minimize impacts on scenic, natural and historic resources and provide adequate financial assurance for the eventual decommissioning of such installations.
  - In granting a Special Permit, the ZBA shall consider the following: effects on habitat & endangered species; character of the surrounding neighborhood; existing natural screening, and remedies to meet any deficiencies; erosion, drainage and storm-water runoff; solar access and clearing.
- 1.4 Permits:** Special Permit from ZBA under new by-law; Building Permit; Site Plan Review.
- 1.5 Surrounding Land Uses:** Farm; Residential; near Goodale Gravel Pit; Head of the Lagoon.
- 1.6 Project History:**
- The property has been in the Norton family for hundreds of years.
  - This area was cleared in 1971 to plant and grow grapes for Chicama Vineyards. It apparently takes 7 years to grow grapes. In year 8 the plants got mildew and died.
  - These fields are rotated between winter squash, potatoes, pumpkins, eggplant and buckwheat.
- 1.7 Project Summary:**
- Proposal to construct a 650 kW solar array with 2,040 solar panels covering approximately 2 acres (83,838 sf) on existing farm fields.
  - The project site would be 65 feet from the southern property line abutting a residential house and 319 feet from Edgartown-Vineyard Haven Road. It would not be visible from Ed-VH Road.
  - The high side of the panels would be 4’8” off the ground and the low side 2’3” off the ground.
  - The solar panels would be mounted on a racking system using I-beam pilings. A transformer would be mounted on a concrete pad on the north side. The electricity would be used to power Bayes Norton Farm. Excess power would be sold at a discounted rate.
  - The area would continue to be farmed as grazing pasture for sheep.

## 2. ADMINISTRATIVE SUMMARY

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- 2.1 DRI Referral:** Oak Bluffs Building Inspector
- 2.2 DRI Trigger:** 9.3 Solar Farm over 50,000 sf (Concurrence Review).
- 2.3 LUPC:** April 4, 2016.
- 2.4 Public Hearing:** To be determined if necessary April 7, 2016

### 3. PLANNING CONCERNS

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#### 3.1 **Some Key Issues**

- The referral is a Concurrence Review. The Question before the MVC at this time is whether or not this proposal is likely to have a regional impact that requires a public hearing review as a DRI.
- The project site is in the Head of the Lagoon sub-watershed and very close to the Lagoon.
- The proposal introduces a light-industrial use (Energy Production) to a farm.
- Part of the property is designated as NHESP Habitat. The proposal currently falls outside of habitat. Should the Applicant consider an alternative site plan that would encroach on some land designated as habitat but would entail less overall cutting.

#### 3.2 **Environment**

- **Vegetation:** A thin strip of trees between two farm fields will be cleared to make room for the array.
- **Habitat:** Part of the property is designated as NHESP Habitat for State Listed Rare Species.
  - The project site is not currently located in habitat.
  - The applicant is proposing to NHESP an alternative site plan that would encroach on some land designated as habitat but would entail less overall cutting.
- **Landscaping:** A fence is proposed around the solar field.
- **Open Space:** The property is not listed on MVC GIC mapping as protected open space.
- **Lighting:** No lighting is proposed.
- **Noise:** The facility will not be manned but will be monitored from offsite.
- **Energy/Sustainability:** The proposal is to construct a 650 kW solar array Solar Farm.
  - The electricity would be used to power Bayes Norton Farm.
  - Remaining would be sold at a discounted rate.
- **Wastewater / Stormwater:**
  - **Nitrogen Loading:**
    - The site is in the Lagoon Pond Watershed. It is in the Head of the Lagoon Sub Watershed. The status of the watershed is impaired.

#### 3.3 **Transportation**

- **Access:** The project site is accessed from an existing dirt road off of Head of the Lagoon Road.
- **Traffic Summary:** The project should have no significant impact on traffic or trips.

#### 3.4 **Affordable Housing**

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#### 3.5 **Economic Impact**

- The project would cover some of the electricity costs of the farm and the owner has said it will help keep the farm a farm.

#### 3.6 **Scenic Values**

- **Streetscape:** The project will not be visible from Edgartown-Vineyard Haven Road.
- **Building Massing:** The solar panels will be mounted on a racking system elevated 2'3" to 4'8" above the ground. A fence is proposed around the entire perimeter of the project.

#### 3.7 **Local Impact/Abutters**

- There is one residential abutter adjacent to the project site that would see the array.

### 4. CORRESPONDENCE

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#### 4.1 **Town Officials:**

#### 4.2 **Island Organizations:**

#### 4.3 **Public:**