

Town of Manchester Planning Board Meeting Minutes

June 17, 2025 – 7:00pm

Present: Board Members Jefferey Flower, Lee Sanders, Tammy Worden, Christine Ciardi, and Pauline DeCook; Chairman Scott VanAken; Code Enforcement Officer Marty Barnett; and Secretary Laurel Pitcher.

Absent: Board Member Steve Buerman.

Also Present: Daryn Loy, Mike Mantell, Chet McLaughlin, Tom Swank, and Tayler Squires.

Application #4647-23: Consider site plan #4647-23 submitted by SunEast Development who is requesting an additional siteplan approval extension on property located at 3169 Co Rd 13, tax map no. 45-1-6.110 in an A-1 district pursuant to Chapter 325 Section 325-75(G)(1) and (2).

Chairman Scott VanAken began by asking the applicants about the project and the progress they've made over the last year. Mike Mantell, a civil engineer with Stantec introduced Chad McLaughlin as the Development Director of SunEast and Tom Swank as the President of SunEast. Mike also said that they're looking for another 12-month extension. Mike then turned it over to Tom Swank.

Mr. Swank said that they've been working on this project since 2016 or 2018 and they're continuing to move forward. He said they've recently reworked the deal with the landowner, including extending the terms of the lease and giving them a lot of money. He said that the interconnect agreement is still slow moving, but that's not isolated to just this project. Tom also said that SunEast has put an additional \$300,000-\$400,000 into the interconnect agreement in the last six months.

Chairman VanAken asked the applicant what impact that additional money made to the interconnect progress. Mr. Swank said it got them more engineering studies, which will help to eventually connect to the grid. Board Member Lee Sanders clarified that there hasn't been any movement, and Tom said that's correct. However, Mr. Swank also said they wouldn't put that much money into something they don't believe in. Scott VanAken then asked what the timeline looks like on this project.

Tom Swank said that the interconnect agreement isn't really the problem anymore. He believes it will be signed by the end of the year, possibly by the beginning of next year, and they plan to have some work done before the agreement comes through. Tom said that the biggest issue he sees is tariffs and uncertainty in the market. He believes in the project, but he said he was unable to give a timeline because they're still unsure about suppliers. He said it's possible that they would need to change things in the future because of this instability. Tom Swank noted that he's aware that the Board's expectations were clear last year, but he said that timing is just bad with everything right now. Tom said that they continue to put money into this project, but they're just not there yet. He said they don't know the future of the tariff situation, so they're asking for another 12-month extension.

Chairman VanAken said that he's been in contact with Board Member Steve Buerman regarding this project and shared his thoughts with the Board. Scott said that Steve mainly focused on the interconnect agreement and wanted to see progress with that. Scott also said that Steve wanted to acknowledge that the applicants have invested significant time and money into this project. Tom Swank responded by saying that they're committed to seeing this through.

The Board had a brief discussion about the differences in the current zoning code versus the code when the applicants first submitted the site plan. The Board has been referencing the old zoning code when reviewing this application, but they considered using parts of the new code. Board Member Tammy Worden said she feels that there is a lot that's not stable with this project including the interconnect agreement, imports, and tariff concerns. Tom responded that most of the supplies can be sourced domestically. Tammy noted that the tariffs wouldn't be applicable in that case. Tammy also said that the applicants themselves noted that the timing is wrong. She then concluded by saying that she feels that the new zoning code is much better and that the Board should decide based on that.

Lee Sanders pointed out that the Decommissioning Plan is outdated. The new code also has stipulations about setting aside farmland elsewhere to compensate for the loss of farmland where the proposed solar farm would be. Lee asked the applicants if the solar array could be made smaller to allocate some of the land to farming. He also said that the interconnect agreement situation really bothers him. Tom responded that they've had other projects that weren't such a problem. He said they've needed to work with the

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National Grid and RG&E, and there were some difficulties there. Tom also said the interconnect agreement is expensive, so the solar farm has to be big to cover those costs. Tom said that the project is really clean, except for the cost of the interconnect agreement. That's what's holding things up, he said.

Board Member Christine Ciardi said she feels the applicants should come back when they're ready. She said they just don't seem ready, and referenced the meeting minutes from the July 16, 2024 Board meeting. She noted that the Board said they would not grant any additional extensions at that meeting.

It was noted that the landowners were not in attendance at this meeting, and Tom Swank said they don't like to drag the landowners around for this long. He also claims that SunEast has paid the landowners more than the market value of the land throughout the duration of their agreement. He said the SunEast team wishes it were completed two years ago, but he feels that the landowners are sufficiently happy with the arrangement.

Board Member Jefferey Flower acknowledged that the landowners have put quite an investment into the project, but he said it's frustrating to keep extending things when the project doesn't meet the new code that was introduced three years ago. Tammy Worden agreed and said the Board isn't trying to be mean. She feels that the Board has been reasonable with their requests. Chairman VanAken noted that last year, the applicants agreed to provide quarterly updates to the Planning Board. He asked if this was done, and Code Enforcement Officer Marty Barnett and the applicants all said no. Jefferey told the applicants that quarterly updates help keep everyone on the same page, and he also said that other solar projects started much later and are already up and running. Tom Swank said they must be small projects, and Chairman VanAken said there's one that's about 100 acres.

Tom Swank said SunEast is trying to make this work. He said if they don't get this approval, they will likely have to be done with the project because the property isn't large enough to meet the new code, and he doesn't feel that there are any other properties in the area that would be sufficient. Mr. Swank said they would even take a 6-month extension. Jefferey Flower asked if the applicants feel like they can show progress in just six months, and Scott VanAken asked the applicants if they feel they'll be ready for a building permit within that six-month period. Tom said they would prefer 12 months, and he's not sure if 6 months will be enough, but it's out of their hands. He said it depends on what happens with the market.

A motion was made by Lee Sanders to deny site plan #4647-23 submitted by SunEast Development who is requesting an additional siteplan approval extension on property located at 3169 Co Rd 13, tax map no. 45-1-6.110 in an A-1 district pursuant to Chapter 325 Section 325-75(G)(1) and (2). Motion seconded by Tammy Worden. The Board Members voted as follows:

Jefferey Flower:	Aye
Lee Sanders:	Aye
Tammy Worden:	Aye
Christine Ciardi:	Aye
Pauline DeCook:	Aye
Steve Buerman:	Absent
Scott VanAken:	Nay

Motion carried.

Previous Minutes:

A motion was made by Pauline DeCook to approve the May 20, 2025 meeting minutes. Motion seconded by Christine Ciardi. All voted "Aye." Motion carried.

Meeting ended at 7:45pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Scott VanAken
Chairman, Planning Board

Laurel Pitcher
Recording Secretary