

Article 30 - Finance Committee Questionnaire

Draft responses submitted on: September 11, 2017

Responses submitted by: Jillian Wilson Martin, Sustainability Coordinator, Town of Natick

- 1. Provide the article motion exactly as it will appear in the Finance Committee Recommendation Book and presented to Town Meeting for action.**

Please see attached motion.

- 2. At a summary level and very clearly, what is the proposed purpose and objective of this Warrant Article and the accompanying Motion?**

Nearly 600 active solar energy systems are currently installed in Natick. At present, "solar" is not defined in Natick's Zoning By-Law, and these systems were all permitted by Natick's Building Department, with several requiring review by the Special Permit Granting Authority. The proposed zoning changes seek to reasonably regulate future solar installations in our community.

- 3. Has this article or one of a very similar scope and substance been on a previous Warrant Article and what has been the actions taken by Finance Committee, other Boards or Committees and Town Meeting?**

No, this article has not been on a previous Town Meeting Warrant and no action has been taken by Town Meeting on this topic. The proposed zoning changes have been the focus of a public hearing with the Natick Planning Board. The public hearing opened on June 21, 2017 and closed on August 30, 2017. A new public hearing for the proposed zoning, in accordance with Town Meeting procedure, is scheduled for September 13, 2017.

- 4. Why is it required for the Town of Natick and for the Town Agency sponsor(s)?**

Solar has consistently proven itself to be a credible return on investment for our municipality, local business owners, and homeowners.

For example, the Town of Natick is expected to receive \$300,000 in savings and solar revenue in Fiscal 2018 from its on-site solar projects, and agreements for off-site projects are expected to result in an additional \$250,000 in annual revenue upon completion. Local large companies and institutions, including MathWorks, the Natick Mall, Walnut Hill School for the Arts and others have also adopted solar and have expressed the financial benefits of doing so.

Solar is also a great benefit for homeowners. For the average residential solar installation, the payback period on a solar array is 4 to 6 years, and a recent study that included six different regions of the country showed that, on average, solar increases a home's value by 3.7%.

Adding clear regulations and guidelines for solar development in Natick will allow more residents and property owners to take advantage of solar's positive return on investment by

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providing a transparent and consistent review process for solar energy systems in Natick. This will reduce soft (non-hardware) costs related to solar installs in our community (thereby lowering the price per kilowatt of solar installed), limit the Town's potential liability by providing a clear process that is in line with state statute, and pave the way for future planning or zoning regulations that emerging technology might necessitate.

The proposed zoning follows guidance from the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources (see attached memo for a comparison of the language proposed for Article 30 and the State's model zoning). It has also been reviewed by commercial and residential solar PV and solar thermal installers, including Ameresco, Boston Solar, Solar Flair and New England Solar Hot Water.

- 5. Does this article require funding, how much, from what source of funds and under whose authority will the appropriation be managed and spent?**

No funding is required to support Article 30.

- 6. Does this article act in any way in concert with, in support of, or to extend any prior action of Natick Town Meeting, Massachusetts General Laws or CMR's or other such legislation or actions? Does this article seek to amend, rescind or otherwise change any prior action of Natick Town Meeting?**

Article 30 does not extend any prior action of Town Meeting nor does it seek to amend, rescind or otherwise change any prior action of Natick Town Meeting.

However, because solar is a "Dover-protected use" as defined by M.G.L. 40A s3, the zoning changes that were approved by Town Meeting in Spring 2017 (Section III – A.7) were reviewed by Town Counsel and Town staff. Article 30 does not seek to change Section III – A.7; instead, the proposed solar zoning outlines different requirements for solar projects requiring site plan review. These requirements are specific to solar and based on Massachusetts' model zoning.

Per Town Counsel's review, Article 30 complies with M.G.L. 40A s3, which states, "No zoning ordinance or by-law shall prohibit or unreasonably regulate the installation of solar energy systems or the building of structures that facilitate the collection of solar energy, except where necessary to protect the public health, safety or welfare"

(<https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleVII/Chapter40A/Section3>).

- 7. How does the proposed motion (and implementation) fit with the relevant Town Bylaws, financial and capital plan, comprehensive Master Plan, and community values as well as relevant state laws and regulations?**

Adopting reasonable solar regulations ties closely to the Town's community values and financial

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priorities.

Natick is a Green Community, a designation provided by the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources, and is a leader in solar development. Our municipality was one of the first in Massachusetts to install solar on public buildings, and we expect to meet 20% of municipal electricity needs with solar by the end of 2018. In spring 2017, the Town was also awarded SolSmart Bronze, a national designation for adopting programs and practices that make it faster, easier, and cheaper to go solar.

The Town's on-site solar arrays are expected to result in \$300,000 in savings and solar revenue in Fiscal 2018, and agreements for off-site projects are expected to result in an additional \$250,000 in annual revenue upon completion.

An enthusiasm for solar also exists in the broader community. With more than 11 megawatts of installed solar, Natick is home to nearly 600 solar arrays and is in the top 20% of states for solar capacity per person. In 2016, Natick ran the state's most successful Solarize Mass campaign in which 155 residents and one small business signed contracts to install a total of 1.2 megawatts of solar capacity.

While exact figures are not currently available, it is also worth noting that the installation of private solar arrays generates revenue for the Town via building and electrical permit fees.

8. Who are the critical participants in executing the effort envisioned by the article motion?

The Building Department and its inspectors, as well as the Natick Planning Board, will be critical to ensuring the proposed regulations are enforced. The proposed zoning language has been reviewed and vetted by members of both groups.

9. What steps and communication has the sponsor attempted to assure that:

- a. Interested parties were notified in a timely way and had a chance to participate in the process**
- b. Appropriate Town Boards & Committees were consulted**
- c. Required public hearings were held?**

The Planning Board is the sponsor of Article 30 and has worked with Town staff and a technical adviser from the U.S. Department of Energy's SolSmart initiative to evaluate the proposed zoning language. We have also held public hearings, conducted outreach to homeowners with solar, engaged Town Counsel, and reviewed the proposed zoning with area solar developers, including Ameresco, the Town's municipal installer and Boston Solar, the Solarize Mass-approved installer that has installed more than 150 residential arrays in Natick (nearly 30% of all installs in the community).

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A public hearing for this zoning opened on June 21, 2017 and closed August 30, 2017. Several members of the public spoke in favor of the zoning language and one member of the public provided guidance that was used to further refine and improve the proposal. The zoning language will be heard again at a new public hearing on September 13, during which a recommendation from the Planning Board is expected to be made.

10. Since submitting the article have you identified issues that weren't initially considered in the development of the proposal?

No. Article 30 and the zoning language behind it was extensively reviewed by stakeholders prior to the Warrant's closure.

11. If this Warrant Article is not approved by Town Meeting what are the consequences to the Town and to the sponsor(s)? Please be specific on both financial and other consequences?

Solar will continue to be installed as it is today, with no dimensional restrictions beyond those defined in building and electrical codes. The site plan review process for solar projects will be subject to the Zoning By-Law's existing site plan review requirements, which do not reflect the state's model zoning suggestions.