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Item No. 15.1.6
Halifax Regional Council
August 6, 2024

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

FROM: Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: July 23, 2024

SUBJECT: **HRM Letter of Support – SolarBank Community Solar Project**

ORIGIN

July 09, 2024 Regional Council motion (Item No.15.4.2):

MOVED by Councillor Mancini, seconded by Councillor Hendsbee

THAT Halifax Regional Council direct the Chief Administrative Officer to provide a staff report to consider a Municipal letter of support for SolarBank Corporation's application to the provincial Community Solar Program

MOTION PUT AND PASSED

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Halifax Regional Council direct the Mayor to forward the letter in attachment 1 to SolarBank Corporation.

BACKGROUND

At the June 13th Environment & Sustainability Standing Committee meeting, representatives of SolarBank Corporation and TriMac Engineering presented a proposal for a 7 MW solar energy system installation in West Petpeswick on behalf of the project's proponent, Petpeswick Solar Inc. This project would be installed through the Province of Nova Scotia's new Community Solar Program. During the presentation, SolarBank requested that the Municipality write a letter of support for the project, a condition of the program application.

The province launched the Community Solar Program in winter 2024, enabling utility-scale solar farms owned and operated independently of Nova Scotia Power for the first time. Businesses, community organizations and other groups may apply to build, own and operate solar farms up to 10 MW in capacity. 100 MW of new solar generation, a third of the 300 MW of utility scale solar generation planned by the province by 2030, will be approved through the program on a first-come, first-serve basis. Project owners earn revenue exclusively by entering a 25-year, fixed rate power purchase agreement with Nova Scotia Power. They are also responsible for selecting residential and business 'subscribers' to their community solar project. These subscribers receive a \$0.02/kWh discount on their Nova Scotia Power bills for their share of the energy the solar farm generates. The program is intended to increase solar access among residents who cannot install rooftop solar, such as those living in apartments.

DISCUSSION

Petpeswick Solar Inc.'s proposal is a 35-acre, 7 MW solar farm in West Petpeswick. The site is currently new growth forest less than 20 years old, and is almost 500m from the nearest residential building. Following the requirements of the Community Solar Program, the project proponents have conducted several community and First Nations engagement activities, the details of which are included in their application.

Petpeswick Solar Inc., the official project proponent and owner, is a subsidiary of AI Renewable, a renewable energy investment fund. SolarBank Corporation is the project developer and operator. SolarBank is an Ontario-based solar power developer with experience developing utility-scale community solar projects similar to this proposal. TriMac Engineering is a Nova Scotia-based firm that will be responsible for most of the engineering work.

The proposed solar farm aligns with two key actions of HalifACT:

- Action 5: Develop partnerships for large-scale solar and wind generation; and
- Action 7: Actively support, advocate and partner with Nova Scotia Power, the Province, and others to decarbonize the provincial electricity grid.

Both actions support an objective of installing 300 MW of community-scale ground mount solar energy generation by 2050, which Petpeswick Solar Inc's 7 MW community solar project would contribute to directly. The integration of solar electricity reduces the emissions intensity of the grid, which is necessary to meet emission reduction targets. HalifACT also recommends community solar as a means of increasing communities' resilience against power outages. Additionally, HalifACT notes that community solar projects can stimulate local economies and build expertise in renewable energy among local businesses. This project is also an opportunity for businesses and construction companies in the Halifax Region to gain experience with larger solar installations.

To receive approval, Community Solar Program project proponents must demonstrate that their project will be successful and beneficial to the community. As such, their application must include:

- Preliminary engineering and site feasibility studies
- Preliminary grid connection assessment
- Construction planning

- Acknowledgement of all required federal, provincial, and municipal permits and approvals
- Financial planning
- Evidence of community and Mi'kmaq engagement and support, including a resolution or support letter from the relevant municipal council
- A plan for how the project will benefit the community
- A subscriber plan, including which communities and groups which will be prioritized and a 'warm list' of interested potential subscribers
- A project risk assessment

All necessary permits and approvals must be obtained from relevant jurisdictions having authorization. Pending project details, this may include provincial permits like a Wetland Alteration Approval, Storm Drainage Works Approval, or a Heritage Research Permit. The proponents will likely also request a Special Move Permit from the province in order to access the project site with construction vehicles via Nova Scotia Highway 107, rather than West Petpeswick Road. The project must also comply with the applicable Municipal Planning Strategy and Land Use By-law, and obtain all applicable municipal permits, regardless of the attached letter of support.

The project must also comply with municipal zoning rules, regardless of the attached letter of support. Provided that the proponent must adhere to all requirements of the Community Solar Program, and must obtain all relevant permits and planning approvals, it is recommended that Halifax Regional Council direct the Mayor to forward the letter in attachment A to SolarBank Corporation.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

No financial implications at this time.

RISK CONSIDERATION

There are no risks associated with the recommendation.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Municipality did not conduct any community engagement with respect to this project. Based on details provided by SolarBank Corporation, engagement with the community was completed.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

The integration of solar into the provincial electricity grid will reduce emissions associated with generation. This aligns with the targets of HalifACT.

ALTERNATIVES

Halifax Regional Council could choose not to forward the attached letter of support to the proponent.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, SNS 2008 c 39:

7A The purposes of the Municipality are to (a) provide good government; (b) provide services, facilities and

other things that, in the opinion of the Council, are necessary or desirable for all or part of the Municipality; and (c) develop and maintain safe and viable communities.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Council Letter of Support – SolarBank Community Solar Project

Report Prepared by: Kevin Boutilier, Manager, Clean Energy, Environment & Climate Change, 902.719.8567
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July 24th, 2024

Department of Natural Resources and Renewables
Province of Nova Scotia
P.O. Box 698
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RE: Letter of Support for the Province of Nova Scotia's Community Solar Program

Please accept this letter on behalf of Halifax Regional Council, in support of the proposed Community Solar Project, presented by SolarBank Corporation, TriMac Engineering and Petpeswick Solar Inc. at the Environment & Sustainability Standing Committee on June 13th, 2024.

As outlined in the presentation, the proposed project would be installed in West Petpeswick as part of the Province of Nova Scotia's new Community Solar Program. Such a project aligns with HalifACT, our ambitious climate plan that outlines various actions aimed at reducing emissions across our community and ensuring our region is more resilient to future climate impacts. The integration of renewable electricity on our grid is critical to achieving our collective emission reduction targets. That said, our endorsement of the project does not negate the need for the proponent to adhere to all municipal zoning rules and obtain necessary permits and approvals from relevant authorities.

In closing, please accept this letter of support for Solarbank Corporation, TriMac Engineering and Petpeswick Solar Inc.'s submission to the Province of Nova Scotia's Community Solar Program.

Sincerely,

Mike Savage
Mayor
Halifax Regional Municipality