

Cotuit Residents Blast Planned Solar Project

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Borrego Solar Systems Project Developer Zachary Farkes speaks to Cotuit residents during a Cotuit Water District Board of Commissioners meeting at Freedom Hall.

COTUIT –Cotuit residents gave Cotuit Water Department Board of Commissioners an earful on Wednesday night after preparation work for a solar project involved the clearing of land outside of the project development area.

Three weeks ago, a subcontractor for Borrego Solar Systems, the company awarded the construction bid, cleared land that was within 50 feet of property lines of residential abutters.

The project on the 32 acres of land off Main Street and Sampson's Mill Road

has yet to be permitted by the town or Cape Cod Commission.

The land is owned by the Cotuit Water Department and calls for 5.7 megawatt solar arrays, but construction called for the digging of test pits and land clearing no more than 300 feet from the nearest house on Mariner Circle.

Zachary Farkes, the project developer for Borrego, wrote an apology letter to the Water Department and to the abutters of the project.

"It was in fact sloppy work, the subcontractor we hired did not follow the plans we gave them but regardless, we take responsibility for everybody who steps on that site," said Farkes.

The company has said that they will clean up, replant trees and restore the site at no cost to the water department or Cotuit taxpayers.

Those plans will be brought to the board for approval before they go forward.

Barnstable Town Councilor Jessica Rapp-Grassetti, who represents Cotuit on the council, said that she advise council to reject the project.

"I absolutely do not support this project and I will not be voting for this amendment," said Rapp-Grassetti. "I will make sure that it does not pass and so that will be the end of this project."

The public comment period became heated between Cotuit residents who were shouting questions and concerns at the water commissioners and representatives from Borrego.

Many residents claimed they didn't know anything about the project, but board chair Ted Barnicle said they've been transparent.

"I've heard some rumblings about how you've been in the dark, I don't know

where the dark is but we started this in 2015 and it's recorded every single time we do it," said Barnicle.

The project needs to have a zoning amendment to include the solar farm parcels as part of the town's Ground Mounted Solar Photovoltaic Overlay District.

The Barnstable Planning Board approved a zoning change last month but final approval will be required by Barnstable Town Council, which will have a hearing on March 23 at Town Hall.

By JUSTIN SAUNDERS, CapeCod.com Newscenter