

# CITY PLANNING DEPARTMENT



## Memorandum – FINAL

**To:** City Plan Commission  
**From:** Jonas U. Bruggemann, MSCRP | Senior Planner  
**Date:** May 28, 2024  
**RE:** Sharpe Drive – Assessors Plat 13, Lot 47  
“Sharpe Drive Solar” – Major Land Development Project: Preliminary Plan

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### I. Applicant | Property | Proposal

The property owner is the Pawtuxet River Authority, and the applicant is Sharpe Solar, LLC, 117 Metro Center Boulevard, Suite 1007, Warwick, RI 02886.

The subject property is located off Sharpe Drive and Ross Simmons Drive, identified as Assessor's Plat 13, Lot 47. The property is zoned M-2 and is not located in any municipal overlay district.

The Proposal is to develop, install, and operate a .4-megawatt (ac) ground mounted solar photovoltaic system with fencing and associated site improvements.

### II. Documents Submitted for This Application

1. Minor Subdivision Plan entitled “Sharpe Drive Solar” prepared by DiPrete Engineering, Inc.; dated May 7, 2024.
2. Major Land Development Project – Preliminary Plan Application, signed by Applicant Representative of Sharpe Solar, LLC and Owner Representative of Pawtuxet River Authority.
3. Project Narrative; prepared by David Russo, P.E. of Revity Energy.; dated May 7, 2024.
4. Stormwater Management Report; prepared by DiPrete Engineering, Inc.; dated December 22, 2023
5. Stormwater System Operation & Maintenance Plan; prepared by DiPrete Engineering, Inc.; dated December 22, 2024
6. Soil Erosion and Sediment Control Plan; prepared by DiPrete Engineering, Inc.; dated December 22, 2024
7. Application Fee for \$725.00; dated March 22, 2024.
8. Preliminary Plan Decision of the Development Plan Review Committee; recorded in the City Clerk's Land Evidence Records Office in Book 6783 Page 82.
9. 100' radius map and list of abutters
10. RIDEM-OWR Freshwater Wetlands Permit (Application No. 24-0002 – RIPDES No. RIR 102621); dated April 24, 2024; recorded in the City Clerk's Land Evidence Records Office in Book 6781 Page 33 on April 26, 2024.
11. Municipal Lien Certificate; dated April 14, 2023.
12. Notarized Affidavit of Notice of Compliance for Abutter Notices; signed by Applicant Legal Representative Robert D. Murray; dated May 16, 2024.

### III. Surrounding Land Use & Context

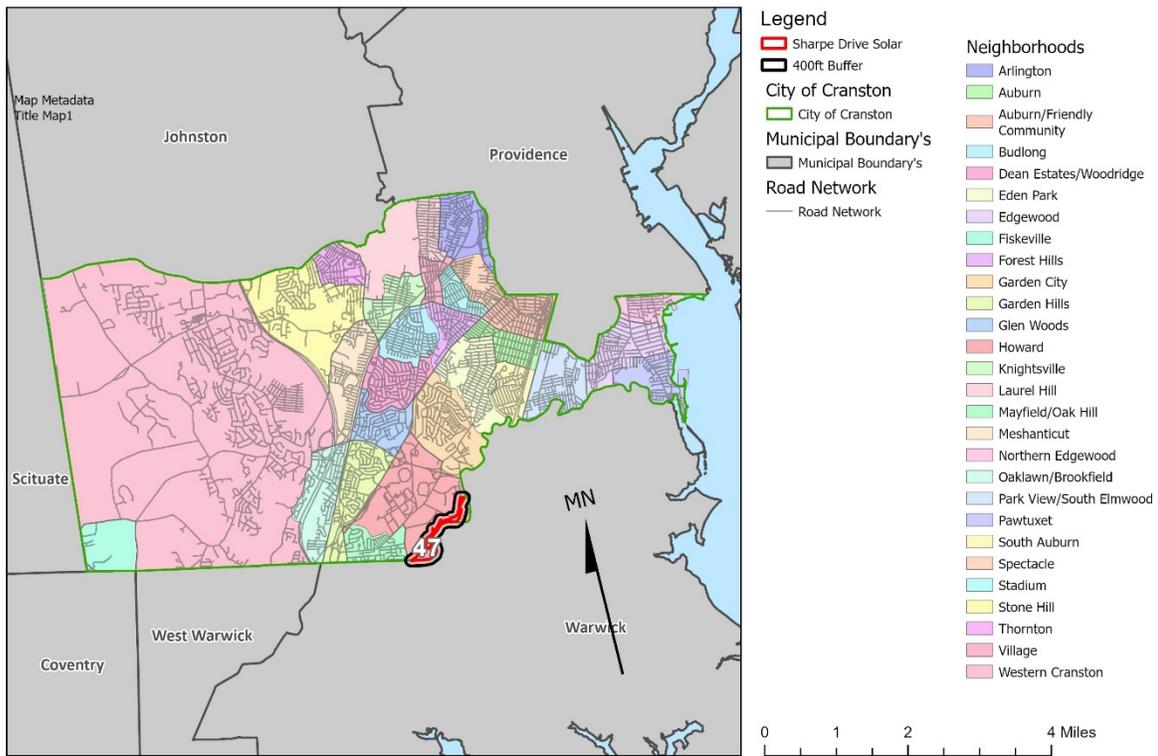
Analysis using the Cranston Geographic Information System and the FEMA Flood Map Service Center indicates that:

1. The subject property is located on the southerly side of Sharpe Drive, southwesterly side of Ross Simmons Drive, easterly side of Pontiac Avenue, and westerly side of Interstate 95.

2. The surrounding area is M-2 land, with M-1 and A-6 to the west of Pontiac Avenue. Development in the area consists of industrial and commercial use.
3. The subject property features wetlands and flood hazard zones that are regulated resource areas under jurisdiction of the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, (RIDEM).
4. The subject property is outside of any identified historic / cultural districts under jurisdiction of the Local Historic District Commission, State Historical Preservation Commission, State, or National Registers of Historic Places.
5. The site is located in a RIDEM designated Groundwater Protection Area and Natural Heritage Area.
6. The subject property is located in FEMA Flood Zones X and AE on FEMA Flood Map Panel 44007C0427H. Both Flood Zones are found within the project area.

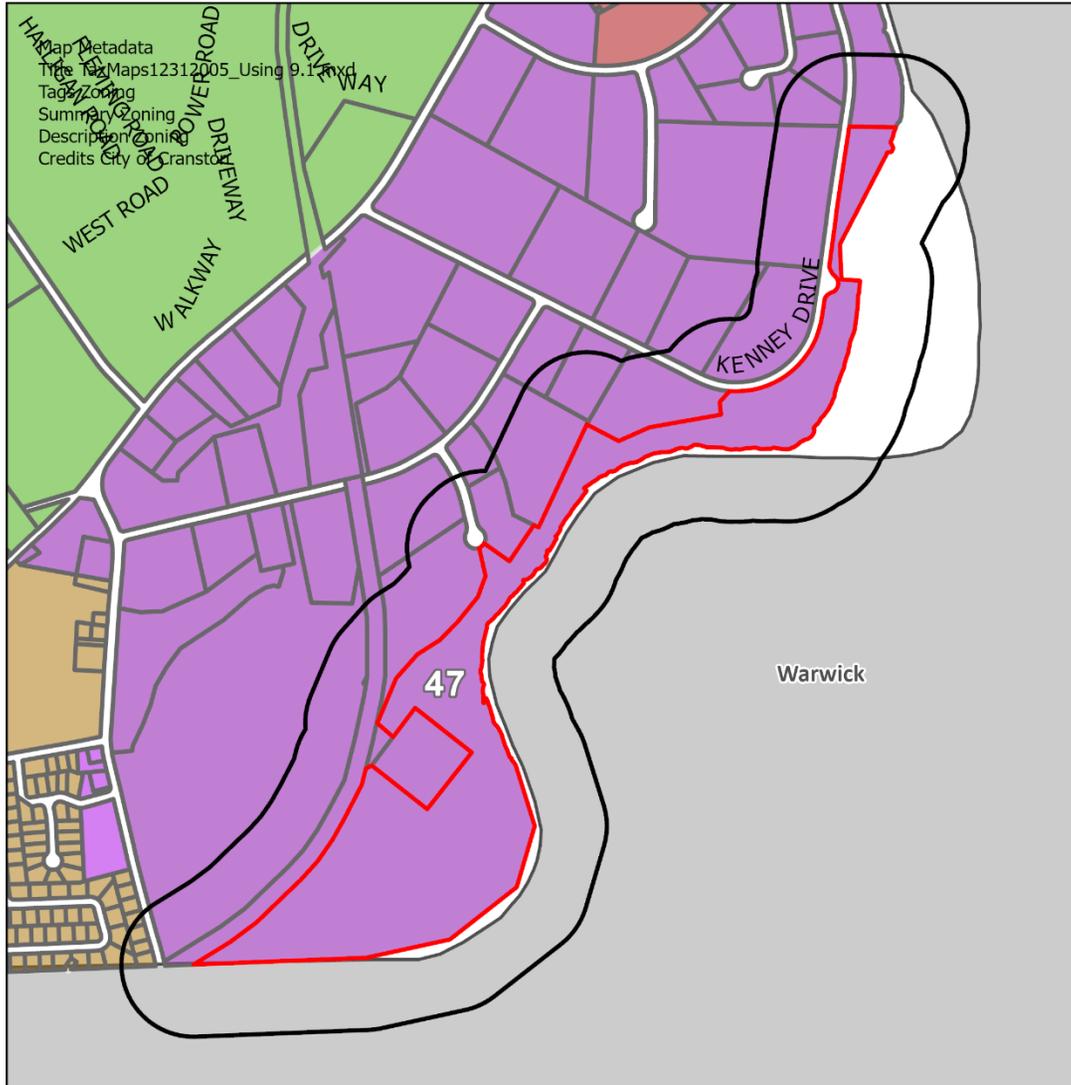
## LOCATION

*THIS MAP IS TO BE USED FOR PLANNING PURPOSES ONLY*



# ZONING

**THIS MAP IS TO BE USED FOR PLANNING PURPOSES ONLY**



## Legend

Sharpe Drive Solar

400ft Buffer

## Zoning

A6

C5

M1

M2

S1

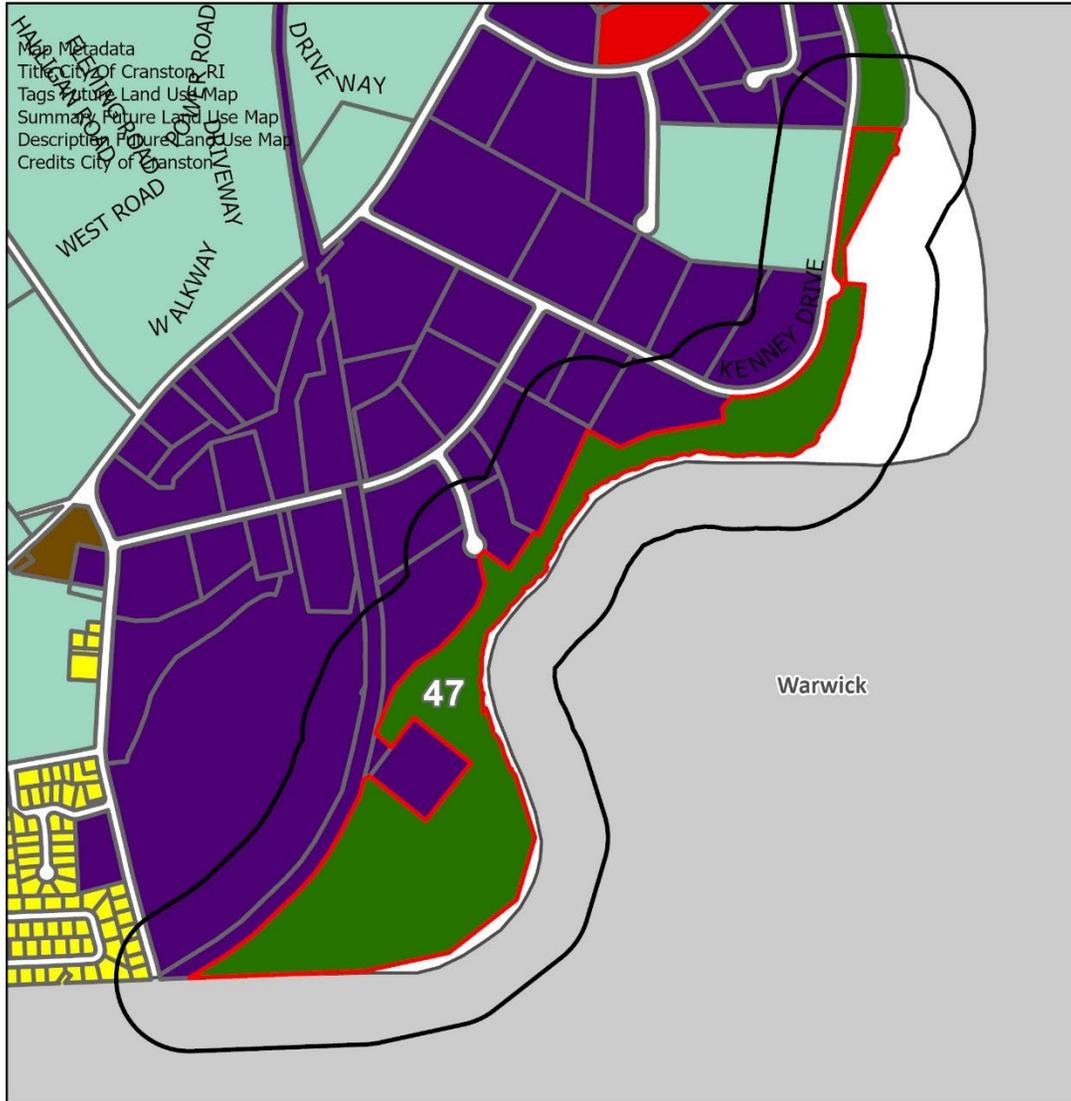
Municipal Boundary's

0 475 950 1,900 US Feet



# FUTURE LAND USE

*THIS MAP IS TO BE USED FOR PLANNING PURPOSES ONLY*



## Legend

Sharpe Drive Solar

400ft Buffer

## Future Land Use

Governmental/Institutional

Highway Commercial/Services

Industrial

Multifamily

Open Space

Single Family Residential 7.26 To 3.64 Unit Per Acre

Municipal Boundary's

0 485 970 1,940 US Feet

MN

**Sharpe Drive – “Sharpe Drive Solar”**

# AERIAL VIEW

*THIS MAP IS TO BE USED FOR PLANNING PURPOSES ONLY*



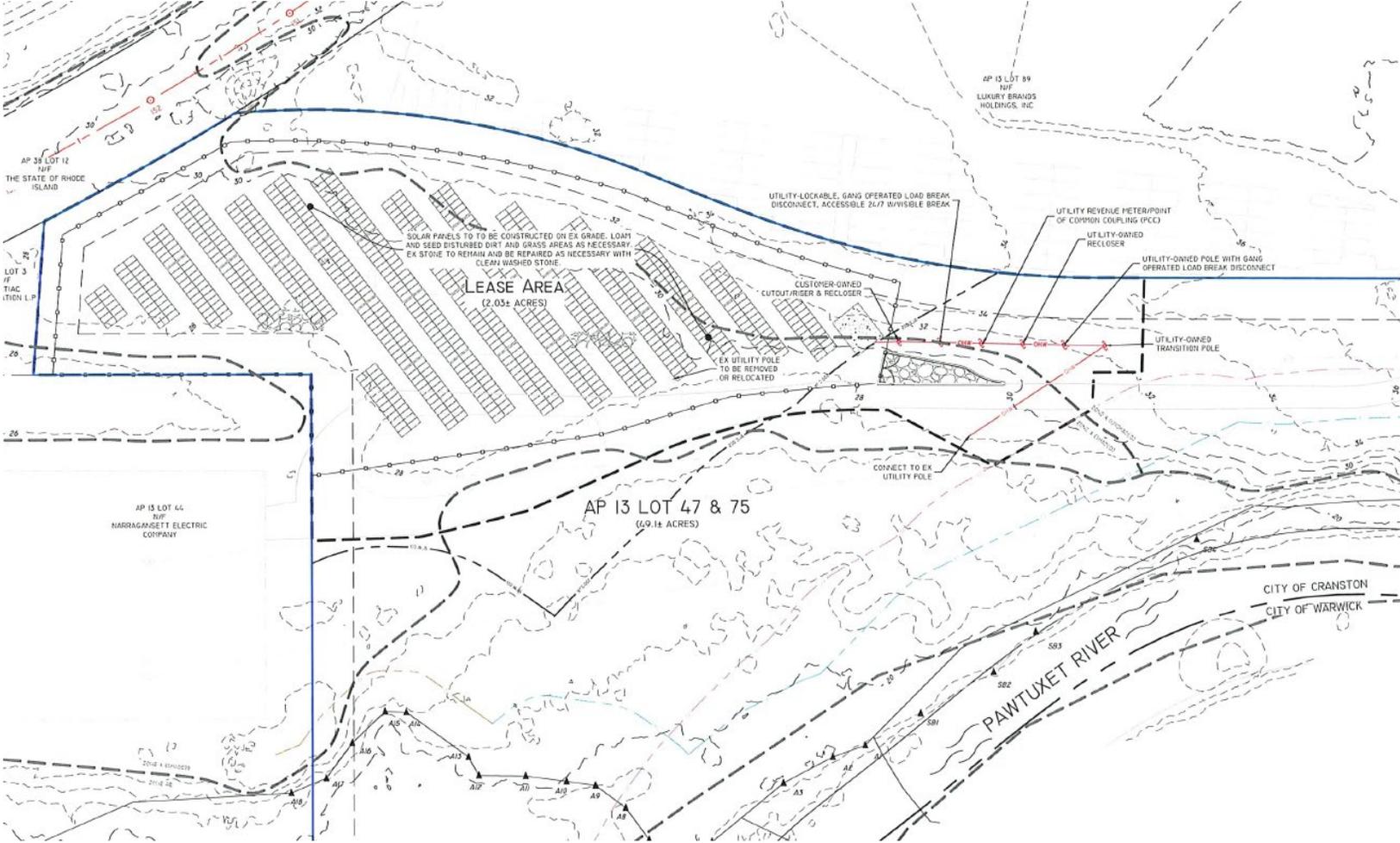
## Legend

- Sharpe Drive Solar
- 400ft Buffer

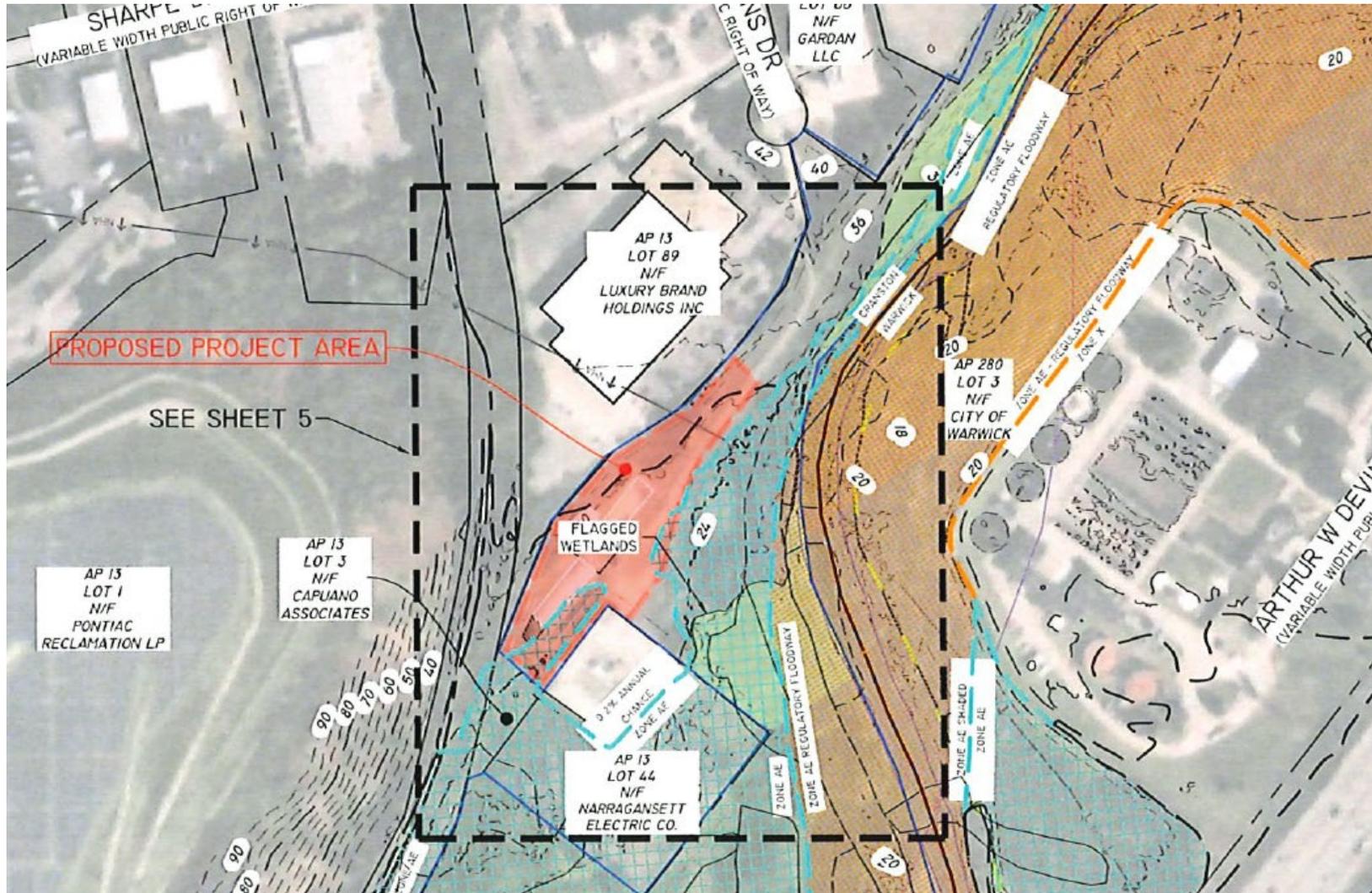


### Sharpe Drive – “Sharpe Drive Solar”

# Site Plan



# Wetlands Plan



#### IV. Municipal Review

Pursuant to RIGL §45-23-37, these Plans and submitted documents were distributed for comment to the following agencies. Responses are as follows:

1. Department of Public Works
  - a. Engineering Division: Mr. Justin Mateus, P.E., Public Works Director, has reviewed the Proposal and did not provide commentary at this time.
  - b. Traffic Safety Division: Mr. Steven Mulcahy has reviewed the Proposal and did not provide commentary at this time.
  - c. Sewer Division: Although Mr. Edward Tally, Environmental Program Manager, hasn't responded at this time, no new sewer lines or alterations to existing sewer lines are proposed.
  - d. Providence Water Supply Board: Although PWSB hasn't responded at this time, no new water supply lines or alterations to existing water supply lines are proposed.
2. Department of Building Inspection & Zoning Enforcement
  - a. Mr. David Rodio, Building Official, has not provided commentary at this time.
  - b. Mr. Stanley Pikul, Alt. Building Official, has reviewed the Proposal and did not provide commentary at this time.
3. Fire Department: Mr. James Woyciechowski, Fire Marshal has reviewed the Proposal and did not provide commentary at this time.

#### V. Planning Analysis

##### Consistency with the Comprehensive Plan

- The Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Map (FLUM) designates the subject property as "Open Space."
  - The Zoning Map and Ordinance designates the subject property as "*M-2 (General Industry)*."
    - The proposed use (Principal solar energy system) is permitted by right in an M-2 zoning district.
    - Staff find that the Application is directly consistent with the Zoning Ordinance.
  - As noted in the Staff Report for the Master Plan Application of this project, Staff acknowledges the inconsistency between the FLUM designation and the Zoning District but determine that this proposal has addressed the issue of inconsistency in the following ways:
    - All proposed development on this parcel is located in an already disturbed area of the site. By utilizing an already disturbed portion of this site, the development can be implemented without encroaching on any undisturbed, ecologically sensitive, or valuable portions of the watershed thus preserving the integrity of the surrounding open space.
    - The owner of the property is the Pawtuxet River Authority, whose mission is "to protect and improve RI's Pawtuxet River and it's watershed." The intention of the non-profit is to utilize the funds generated via the lease agreement with Sharpe Drive, LLC. to offset the expenses of their headquarters; by which the ownership and operation of said headquarters is a requirement of RI General Law. This offsetting of expenses aids the non-profit in preserving and protecting over 100 acres of land within the Pawtuxet River

Watershed and more specifically the remainder of the undeveloped 50 acres of land located on this parcel.

- The installation of this photovoltaic system requires a relatively small land area while generating a substantial amount of energy compared to traditional energy sources.
  - By generating revenue for the Pawtuxet River Authority, minimizing ecological impacts on this site, and contributing to clean energy generation within Cranston, this solar development can be a powerful tool in sustainable land management for the non-profit.
- The Comprehensive Plan outlines goals, policies, and action items pertaining to residential development which Staff find support the approval of this Application, specifically:
    - NRG-1 Protect and enhance Cranston's natural environment and resources. Establish a balance between natural resource protection and growth-related needs.
      - NRP-1.6 Preserve and protect critical fish and wildlife habitat areas and areas containing rare and endangered species.
      - NRP-1.7 Preserve and protect environmentally sensitive natural resource areas, including prime farmlands, steep slopes, floodplains, watersheds, aquifers, shorelines, and coastal and inland wetlands.
    - NRG-3 Protect and enhance the quality of Cranston's ground and surface water resources and supplies in order to meet, or where appropriate exceed, state and federal water quality standards.
      - NRP-3.2 Require construction practices that minimize runoff, soil erosion, and sedimentation.

#### Consistency with the Surrounding Area

The subject parcel is zoned M-2 (General industrial). The surrounding area is zoned almost entirely as M2, with very few parcels within a 400' radius of the parcel being zoned M-1, or A-6 west of Pontiac Avenue. All abutting parcels to the actual site of disturbance are zoned M-2 and feature commercial or industrial uses in line with the M-2 zoning district. Notably, a solar farm installation is present on a capped landfill between Pontiac Avenue and the subject property.

#### Access to the Site and Fencing

Access to the site will be achieved via an existing 15' wide gravel driveway. The facility will be surrounded by an 8' high chain link fence, preventing unauthorized access. The final design of the driveway and fencing will be subject to review by the City's Department of Public Works and the Fire Department.

#### Environmental Impact

The parcel included a RIDEM Natural Heritage Area and is located within a Groundwater Reservoir Area. The applicant has stated that due to the location of the panels on a pre-existing disturbed area on site and that there are no anticipated impacts on either the protected species or the groundwater in the area. This project is subject to RIDEM approval, and the applicant has stated that they will be coordinating with a wetland biologist during the design process to ensure the prevention of any impact on the sensitive species located in the subject parcel.

#### **VI. Interests of Others**

None to Report.

#### **VII. Additional Matters**

Master Plan Stage of Review: This Proposal previously received Master Plan Approval and Development Plan Review Approval. A review of the Conditions imposed at Master Plan indicate the

imposed Conditions have been satisfied.

Development Plan Review Committee: This Proposal received Preliminary Plan Approval from the Development Plan Review Committee on July 11, 2023. No Conditions were imposed as part of the Preliminary Plan Approval.

### **VIII. Waivers**

None Requested.

### **IX. Findings of Fact**

An orderly, thorough, and expeditious technical review of this Preliminary Plan has been conducted. Property owners within a 100' radius have been notified via first class mail and the meeting agenda has been properly posted.

Staff has reviewed this Preliminary Plan application for conformance and consistency with the required Findings of Fact in accordance with RIGL § 45-23-60 as well as the Subdivision & Land Development Regulations and finds as follows:

*RIGL § 45-23-60. Procedure – Required findings. (a)(1) states, “The proposed development is consistent with the comprehensive plan and/or has satisfactorily addressed the issues where there may be inconsistencies.”*

- The proposed Major Land Development has satisfactorily addressed the issues where there may be inconsistencies with the Comprehensive Plan, particularly in regard to inconsistencies with the Future Land Use Map designation.

*RIGL § 45-23-60. Procedure – Required findings. (a)(2) states, “The proposed development is in compliance with the standards and provisions of the municipality's zoning ordinance.”*

- The Proposal is consistent with the Zoning Ordinance.

*RIGL § 45-23-60. Procedure – Required findings. (a)(3) states, “There will be no significant negative environmental impacts from the proposed development as shown on the **final** plan, with all required conditions for approval.” (emphasis added)*

- No significant environmental impacts are anticipated.
- The Proposal will be subject to all state and local regulations pertaining to environmental impacts and wetlands.
- The Rhode DEM's Natural Heritage map shows that are known rare species located on the site and the applicant has stated during the Master Plan Stage of Review that they will be coordinating with a wetland biologist during the design process to ensure the prevention of any impact on the sensitive species located in the subject parcel.
- The Application has supplied a RIDEM-OWR Freshwater Wetlands Permit.

*RIGL § 45-23-60. Procedure – Required findings. (a)(4) states, “The subdivision, as proposed, will not result in the creation of individual lots with any physical constraints to development that building on those lots according to pertinent regulations and building standards would be impracticable. (See definition of Buildable lot). Lots with physical constraints to development may be created only if identified as permanent open space or permanently reserved for a public purpose on the approved, recorded plans.”*

- The Proposal will not result in the creation of individual lots with such physical constraints to development that building on those lots according to pertinent regulations and building standards would be impracticable.

- The design and location of building lots, utilities, drainage, and other improvements will conform to local regulations for mitigation of flooding and soil erosion.

*RIGL § 45-23-60. Procedure – Required findings. (a)(5) states, “All proposed land developments and all subdivision lots have adequate and permanent physical access to a public street. Lot frontage on a public street without physical access shall not be considered in compliance with this requirement.”*

- The Proposal will have adequate permanent physical access to Ross Simmons Drive, a public city street.
- The Proposal provides for safe and adequate local circulation for vehicular traffic.

#### **X. Recommendation**

Staff finds this Proposal generally consistent with the Comprehensive Plan, the Zoning Ordinance, and the standards for required Findings of Fact set forth in RIGL § 45-23-60.

Staff therefore recommends that the City Plan Commission adopt the Findings of Fact documented above and **APPROVE** the Preliminary Plan submittal subject to the conditions denoted below.

#### **XI. Recommended Conditions of Approval**

The Final Plan submittal shall be subject to the following:

1. A Final Plan for Development Plan Review shall be approved prior to the approval of the Final Plan approvals for the Major Land Development Plan.

Respectfully Submitted,



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Jonas U. Bruggemann, MSCRP  
Senior Planner / Administrative Officer

Cc: City Planning Director  
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