

OEJE / DPP Pre-Filing Engagement Meeting April 9th

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#bess-carpenter-hill-ma_0001

 Thursday, April 9th

Format	Zoom video call
Purpose	Pre-filing engagement kick-off — marks official start of the pre-filing outreach period per 980 CMR 16.00
State Attendees	• Veena Dharmaraj (DPP Director, DPU) • Syenna Mashmasarmi (OEJE Program Manager, EEA) • Maria Belen Power (Undersecretary of EJ&E, EEA) • Amanda G. Hunt (DPP Fellow, DPU)
ESA Attendees	• Ernest (Communications Manager) • Wes (Director of Planning & Engagement) • Tamara Irving (Planner) • Jonathan (Development Associate) • Javier (CDO)

1. Background & Project Context

Wes Shaffer provided a geographic and regulatory overview of the Carpenter Hill BESS project. Key points for the record:

- Project location: Southwest of Worcester in Charlton, MA. Co-located with an existing transmission corridor running through Charlton connecting to a nearby substation. An Amazon distribution warehouse and several smaller solar facilities are in the vicinity.
- Land: ESA has leased land from the Evelyn family. The parcel is currently forested. It was cultivated in the distant past but has not been active farmland for many years.
- Corporate structure: Carpenter Hill Power, LLC is the project entity. ESA Solar is the current owner of that LLC. ESA is headquartered in Maitland, Florida with satellite offices in DC, Michigan, and California.
- Business model: ESA's core model is to develop, permit, and sell projects to a long-term owner-operator. ESA does not expect to own or operate the completed facility. The community benefit plan and all project conditions are intended to run with the project and transfer to any future owner.
- Overlay district history: Approximately two years ago, ESA petitioned the Town of Charlton to establish an energy storage overlay district, as grid-scale BESS is not permitted under existing bylaws (5 MW maximum; ESA needs 150 MW). The planning commission process was paused when the state's new unified permitting framework (980 CMR 16.00) was being developed. ESA is now re-introducing the project under the state process. The April 2024 Planning Commission session is on the public record.
- This meeting officially starts the pre-filing outreach period. Veena Dharmaraj confirmed that ESA may have engaged stakeholders prior to today, but this meeting is Day 1 of the regulatory pre-filing clock. The period runs until the pre-filing notice is submitted to the EFSB.

2. State Team Opening Expectations

Veena Dharmaraj — DPP Director

- Pre-filing requirement: All project developers must meet with DPP and OEJE at the start of the pre-filing process. This is that meeting.
- The pre-filing outreach period is now open. It runs from today until ESA submits the pre-filing notice to the EFSB.
- The intent of pre-filing engagement is to ensure all key stakeholders are informed, able to weigh in, and that their input is taken into consideration — with developers being communicative about where the project stands at every point.
- Outreach does not stop after pre-filing. It should continue through EFSB adjudication, construction, and operations. The focus and channels may shift, but engagement is ongoing.

Syenna Mashmasarmi — OEJE Program Manager

- Treat regulatory requirements as a floor, not a ceiling. The requirements define minimums; the goal is genuine co-design with communities.
- Community input should be received and documented — but also incorporated. That incorporation should itself be documented. And it should materially change project outcomes.

Maria Belen Power — Undersecretary of EJ&E

- Meaningful community engagement in the neighborhoods where projects are sited.
- Language access: services must be provided in the languages spoken by residents.
- The outcome of engagement activities should result in a concrete product — project changes, community benefit agreements, or other tangible responses that reflect community needs and concerns.

3. Website Feedback

Veena Dharmaraj, Syenna Mashmasarmi, and Amanda G. Hunt reviewed carpenterhillpower.com live during the meeting.

Feedback:

Technical Bugs — Requires Immediate Fix

- Accordion dropdowns not functioning: Veena and Amanda both confirmed the accordion sections (e.g., “What is actually being built here?”) do not open on Chrome or Safari. The ‘+’ button does not work. Content is therefore invisible to many visitors.
- Language switcher not functioning: The English / Spanish / Portuguese dropdown in the upper right corner does not switch languages for Veena or Amanda. The site appears English-only to affected users.
- Veena offered to share her browser console (Inspect → Console) at the end of the call to help diagnose errors. Action: ESA should test on Firefox, Chrome, Edge, and Safari across devices before the April 14 Select Board meeting.

Content & Structure

- Detailed project map: Veena requested a map showing project boundaries, component locations, and key landmarks within a one-mile radius — including abutters, schools, hospitals, and other notable features. This should appear on the website and be included in the updated information package.
- Contact information prominence: A named contact person with contact details exists on the site but is at the bottom and not prominent enough. It needs to be clearly accessible, not buried.
- Email distribution list signup: Required under regulation 16.9. Must be added to the site. Veena referenced Section 16.9 as a checklist ESA should review to ensure the website covers all required elements.
- Phone/text hotline: Mentioned in the information packet but absent from the website. If this channel exists, it must appear on the site.
- Upcoming events listings: Events listed on the site do not specify location or meeting format (virtual, in-person, or hybrid). This must be added so visitors know how and where to participate.
- Business model transparency: The current site language around project transfer is framed as “if” it happens. Syenna noted it should be framed as “likely” — because it is very probable that the project will be sold to an owner-operator. Community members need to understand this upfront so they are not surprised later. This can be addressed on the website or in initial community conversations, but it must be addressed before substantive engagement begins.
- Company background: Syenna recommended expanding the information about ESA and its other projects on the site. Outside companies coming into Massachusetts communities face skepticism; more context about who ESA is and what they have built elsewhere helps address

that.

- AI companion: Both Syenna and Amanda flagged the AI chatbot feature as something that gave them pause. Neither had a specific recommendation to remove it, but the perception and usefulness for a general community audience is uncertain. ESA acknowledged this and noted it is under consideration.

4. Information Packet Feedback

The state team received the information packet three days before the meeting. Veena noted this is not enough lead time; a minimum of two weeks is requested for all future material submissions. Ernest acknowledged and apologized.

Project Impacts

- Veena requested clarity on whether ESA is conducting studies for each listed impact category (fire, noise, visual/landscape, environmental, construction). The answer: yes, with some studies underway and others planned as part of the filing requirements.
- Environmental findings to date: Field analysis with environmental specialists has not found deleterious impacts to wetlands or aquifers. Topography raises stormwater considerations that will be tracked.
- Site suitability analysis: ESA is building this out in line with new regulations, drawing from DPU webinars. A more formal template from DPU is anticipated.
- Fire safety: ESA is working with a fire safety consultant who was involved in writing portions of NFPA recommendations for BESS. ESA plans to host a fire safety webinar as part of the campaign. The consultant will present.
- OEJE's requirement: Share impact findings as they become available — do not hold them until filing. The regulation requires that potential impacts be shared with the community so residents can propose alternatives or mitigation. This is not optional.
- Tree removal: Approximately 10 acres is the upper limit of forested land that would be cleared. Veena flagged this as likely to be a highly sensitive issue for Charlton. A tree survey should be part of the site suitability analysis. No heritage trees have been identified yet.

Abutters & Stakeholders

- ESA currently has 3 residential abutters. One is a prominent agricultural operation that ESA has designated a “neighbor of special consideration.” Remaining adjacent parcels are undeveloped forested land.
- Veena's request: The information packet lists stakeholder categories but does not quantify them. She needs actual counts and types — e.g., “3 residential abutters, 1 agricultural operation, 2 businesses” — for each stakeholder group listed.
- Neighborhood and civic groups: The packet mentions these as a category. Veena asked whether ESA has already identified specific groups. If not, local officials in Charlton can help direct ESA to active community and advocacy organizations.
- Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission: Veena recommended ESA reach out. They have done planning work with Charlton in the past and have relevant community resources. A link was shared in the meeting chat.
- Faith-based organizations and health-focused groups: Also recommended as outreach targets.

Agency Consultation

- The current information packet lists only local/municipal agencies (Select Board, Planning Board, Conservation Commission, etc.). No state agencies are listed.
- Veena's clarification: All projects must identify and plan to meet with every state agency from which they will need a permit — e.g., MassDEP, MIPA (formerly MEPA), Fish & Wildlife. This is a regulatory requirement, not optional.
- ESA should compile a full agency list (local + state) and submit it with the updated information packet.

5. Outreach & Engagement Feedback

Abutter Outreach Timing

- ESA's initial plan was sequential: meet agencies first, then grasstops stakeholders, then grassroots. OEJE strongly recommended running

abutter outreach in parallel — not after — agency meetings.

- Wes agreed: the April 14–15 window (already in Charlton for the Select Board and Planning Board meetings) should also be used for door-knocking on abutters. The team updated their approach during the meeting.

Pre-Meeting Public Awareness

- Before the April 14 Select Board and April 15 Planning Board meetings, community members should know these meetings are happening. ESA should not wait until after to notify the public.
- Recommended channels for advance notice: post flyers in the Charlton town library and town office; ask the town to promote meetings through its own social media channels; use ESA's social media if active.

Outreach Channels — Gaps Identified

- ESA's current plan lists: project website, surveys, abutter mailers, newsletter, phone/text hotline. Veena noted these are a good foundation but are not sufficient on their own before public meetings.
- Additional channels recommended:
 - Flyers posted in key community locations
 - Active social media outreach specific to this project
 - Coordination with the town to amplify through municipal channels
 - Trusted community messengers — respected residents or local leaders who can share information organically
 - Local cable access channels (if available in Charlton) to highlight upcoming meetings
- Veena also asked: what will be covered at each public meeting, and how will residents know in advance what topics will be discussed and how to provide input?

Additional Topic-Specific Meetings

- Veena recommended ESA hold additional meetings beyond the 2 mandatory public meetings — smaller, topic-specific sessions that allow deeper conversation.
- Fire safety specifically: Given community concerns around BESS fire risk (confirmed from ESA's 2024 overlay district experience as the #1 concern), a dedicated fire safety session is warranted. A general public meeting where fire is one of many topics may not allow enough time for that conversation.
- ESA confirmed: the July slot previously listed as a general community meeting is now planned as a fire safety webinar. The team acknowledged it may need to be in-person rather than virtual, depending on community preference.
- Veena's suggestion: even if the event is in-person, record the presentation portion and post it to the website so people can watch it more than once. The fire safety topic requires time to digest.

Landowner Relationships

- Wes noted that ESA plans to leverage its relationship with the Evelyn family (the leaseholder) and their community connections as a way to make initial introductions and build grassroots credibility.

6. Timeline & Filing

- Pre-filing outreach completion target: late October to early November 2026.
- EFSB filing: Javier confirmed filing is unlikely in 2026. The team expects to use 2026 to advance the application and file in 2027.
- ISO-NE interconnection application: Target submission October 2026. This is a public ISO New England process.
- Interconnection as the long pole: Even after EFSB approval, the interconnection process can take 3–5 years. The final construction and commissioning timeline depends on interconnection completion, not just permitting.
- Who constructs: ESA will sell the permitted project to an owner-operator who will construct and operate it. ESA will not be the construction entity.

- Quarterly updates: ESA’s proposed quarterly “table touch” cadence aligns with the regulatory requirement. Veena confirmed the regulation requires quarterly updates to key stakeholders, which can be delivered via an email distribution list. This cadence applies during the pre-filing period and continues after.
- Maintenance engagement: ESA raised the concept of a “maintenance” phase of engagement after the main pre-filing campaign winds down. Veena affirmed this is appropriate — the garden metaphor applies: if you stop tending, you have to start over. Engagement should not go dark.

7. Meeting Documentation Standards

Veena provided guidance on what OEJE expects in meeting documentation for regulatory purposes:

- Themes, not transcripts: Document the themes of comments raised — not a verbatim account of every statement.
- Participation: Record who attended (categories of participants; individual names where appropriate).
- Concerns raised: Note what concerns or questions came up, even if the same concern was raised by multiple people.
- Response and changes: Document how ESA took input into consideration and whether any project changes resulted.
- Midpoint checklist: When ESA self-identifies as being at the midpoint of pre-filing, a checklist of documentation must be submitted to OEJE/DPP.
- Templates coming: OEJE is developing standardized templates for meeting notes and other documentation. These will be available in the coming months. In the interim, OEJE will review whatever format ESA submits and provide feedback.

8. Next Steps

Wes offered to stop by the state offices in person during the April 14–15 Charlton trip if schedules allow, or to schedule a follow-up Zoom in late April. The state team expressed openness to continued meetings throughout the project.

Action Items

types of edits

1. meeting OJEJE concerns
2. public website info

Item	By When
Fix accordion dropdowns — not working on Chrome or Safari	Before Apr 14
Fix language switcher (EN/ES/PT) — not functioning for users	Before Apr 14
Add named contact + contact details prominently to website	Before Apr 14
Add email distribution list signup to website (per reg. 16.9)	Before Apr 14
Add phone/text hotline number to website	Before Apr 14
Update upcoming events with location and format (virtual/in-person/hybrid)	Before Apr 14
Clarify business model language on site: project transfer is likely, not speculative	Before 1st public meeting
Add detailed project map (boundaries, components, 1-mile landmarks incl. schools, hospitals, abutters)	ASAP

Update information packet: add abutter counts by type (residential, agricultural, business)	Within 2 weeks
Update information packet: add state agencies to consultation list (MassDEP, MIPA, Fish & Wildlife, etc.)	Within 2 weeks
Resend updated information packet to OEJE/DPP – minimum 2 weeks advance notice for future submissions	Within 2 weeks
Begin abutter door-knocking during April 14–15 Charlton trip (run in parallel with agency meetings)	Apr 14–15
Post advance notices for Select Board and Planning Board meetings in town library, town office, and via town social media	Before Apr 14
Schedule follow-up meeting with OEJE/DPP	This week
Review regulation 16.9 website checklist against current site	Before Apr 14
Review fire safety webinar format – determine in-person vs. virtual; confirm July slot	April

Prepared by ESA Solar – Carpenter Hill Power, LLC – April 9, 2026. For internal use and regulatory record.