

Exhibit CS-BW-63

Docket 8302

Exhibit CS-MK-7

Supplemental Aesthetic Assessment

Supplemental Aesthetic Assessment Report Chelsea Solar Project September 26, 2014

Introduction

In June of 2014, SE Group prepared a visual resource assessment for the proposed Chelsea Solar Project. This report addressed the potential visual impacts to the general public from the development of the 2.2 MW (DC) array on a currently wooded hillside just north of the Route 7/ VT279 interchange in Bennington, Vermont.

As previously described, the Project will consist of solar arrays containing non-reflective photovoltaic modules, oriented to the south and placed on racks driven into the ground. The racking system is designed so that the bottom of the lowest panel (each rack is a combination of multiple modules) is about 18 inches above the natural terrain. The overall height of the modules will maximally be about nine (9) feet. No grading is planned, as the racks will be set on posts driven into the ground. The current design plan is shown on Figure 1.

During our original assessment we noted the presence of three residential structures to the north and east of the Project site associated with the Apple Hill Road neighborhood. While we did not visit those individual properties, our desktop and field investigation suggested that the potential visual impact to those nearby residences was minimal given the preservation of some woodlands along the periphery of the Project site, the low height of the panels and the shape of the landform. The location of these three residences is shown on Figure 1.

The terrain of the Project site slopes gently from a high elevation of 758 feet at the northeast corner to a low point of 664 near the southwest corner. Overall the grade is about 8% with a total vertical change of 94 feet. Given the nature of the terrain, long-range views from vantage points uphill (i.e. near the identified residential properties) should not be significantly impacted. In fact, with the clearing proposed, some longer-range views to the south might open up for these adjacent properties.

While the original assessment fully addressed the potential impacts as required through the Quechee Test, the Petitioner has heard some specific concerns expressed about impacts to the most proximal Apple Hill neighbors. To help address these concerns more fully, SE Group conducted additional field assessment and analysis. After review of this information we are recommending some additional mitigation strategies that we believe will help to further improve the compatibility of the Project with this setting and directly address the concerns expressed by these neighbors.

Field Assessment and Analysis

On August 5, 2014, staff from SE Group conducted an additional field reconnaissance of the subject property to better understand the existing condition along the northern and eastern property boundaries. As part of this field reconnaissance, a number of photographs were taken to document these conditions. (See Figure 3).

At present, the Project site is densely wooded with a combination of northern hardwood trees and a dense understory. This density made mobility within the site extremely difficult in some areas; precluding access to some portions along the northern boundary. Figure 3 provides photographs from areas in/around the property boundaries documenting these conditions. The existing understory is highly effective at screening and we would expect it to continue to be even during leaf-off condition, given the observed stem density.

We have also expanded our analysis of the Project by creating two additional cross-sections (See Figures 4 and 5). These cross-sections illustrate the nature of terrain/vegetation patterns following development of the Project. We have extended the section lines to intersect with specific residential structures for reference.

Cross Section 1 (Figure 4): This section is drawn from Apple Hill Road residence #3 south and west through the proposed array to the inverter skid. Along this section line the terrain falls away significantly (over 30 feet) between the residential structure and the nearest array. The array is set back 520 feet from this residential structure. The section also depicts both existing and new supplemental landscaping which will intervene between the residential structure and the Project site.

Cross Section 2 (Figure 5): This section is drawn from Apple Hill Road residence #1 and in a similar orientation to #1 (above). It also documents how the terrain drops away (nearly 20 feet) between the residential structure and the most proximal panel (which is about 255 feet away). This section also passes through the “notch”, an area where the Project fence line and clearing limits have been pushed southward. This notch allows an upwards of 30 feet of retained woodland to remain. Areas of potential supplemental landscape mitigation are also shown on the section line.

Review of Potential Visual Impacts

We had previously characterized the potential visual impacts on nearby residential properties as generally low. The new field work does not substantively change this assessment. We do note that although the Project requires clearing of most the site to accommodate the array, it retains a “notch” along the northern property line where the array layout shifts slightly and where no panels are planned. We recommended a shift in the Project fence line to avoid this

area which will allow retention of some of the understory to help enhance screening. This area also coincides with the shared boundary with the neighbor directly north of the Project (Residence #1). This neighbor has cleared a portion of their property and maintenance of some understory could help limit views of the array. Much of the remainder of the northern boundary is densely wooded north of the Project site. This area is shown in detail on Figure 2.

On the east side of the Project site, the neighboring parcel includes remnants of an old apple orchard along with new successional growth which is becoming quite dense. This adjacent property is under the control of the Petitioner. A Photograph taken from the apple orchard to the west (See Figure 3, Viewpoint D) shows this condition. The Project access road will move along the northern part of this adjacent property. Views from the third residential structure towards the Project site will be limited by this existing vegetation with the exception of where the new access road will enter the Project Site (See Figure 2 and Figure 3, Viewpoint C).

Overall the field assessment and analysis reaffirmed our conclusion that preservation of wooded areas along the northern and eastern property line will enhance screening of the Project. It also suggested that some areas along the northern and eastern property lines might be more open following clearing for the Project.

Additional Mitigation Measures

In general, our recommendation for using mitigation plantings is to address clearly identified impacts where new landscape can be effective and is reasonable given other considerations. We had previously included landscape mitigation along a short stretch of the western property line in the vicinity of the inverter enclosure and still believe this mitigation is necessary. Our only additional recommendation to this landscape is to add some evergreen species (white cedar) which has been incorporated into the supplemental landscape mitigation plan (See Figure 2).

With uncertainties of what the post-clearing condition will reveal, additional mitigation measures are reasonable to address potential offsite impacts to adjacent residential properties. We have identified the following measures:

1. Move the Project fence southward to conform more closely to the array layout in the area of the “notch” and reduce, to the degree possible, clearing in this location (See Figure 2).
2. Provide supplemental landscaping along the northern boundary as necessary to mitigate offsite visibility. Following clearing of existing vegetation and upon our inspection, we would develop a more formal plan for adding new plantings to improve screening and mitigate offsite visual impacts. On a conceptual basis, we have recommended (See Figure 2) that a variety of native deciduous and coniferous trees and shrubs (including spruce, serviceberry, cedar, and dogwood) be planted to bolster in areas where clearing

reveals potential offsite visibility. The exact quantity and placement of plant materials may be adjusted to reflect the inspection suggested above. The anticipated palette of plant materials shown on the Supplemental Plant List is provided as a reference. These species are native to Vermont and considered hardy and effective for mitigation purposes. The exact species to be installed following inspection of the post-construction site condition will be based on a review of underlying soils, effectiveness in integrating with existing retained plant materials and screening effectiveness.

Conclusions

While our original analysis was correct in identifying the fact that the visibility of the Project will be limited from offsite residential areas to the north because of existing vegetation patterns and the shape of the existing terrain, this supplemental analysis also suggested a few areas where new mitigation might better address potential visual impacts. Given the existing state of the site (highly dense understory), we believe the best strategy to assure mitigation is effective and reasonable will be to finalize mitigation plans following clearing of the site. Clearing will reveal if and where new supplemental plantings are needed. While our concept plan provides a reference for these areas, it also helps reinforce the fact that mitigation can be effective.

We continue to conclude that the Project as proposed and with the possible inclusion of supplemental plantings does not create an undue adverse impact on the visual resource.

Figures

Figure 1 – Supplemental Site Plan

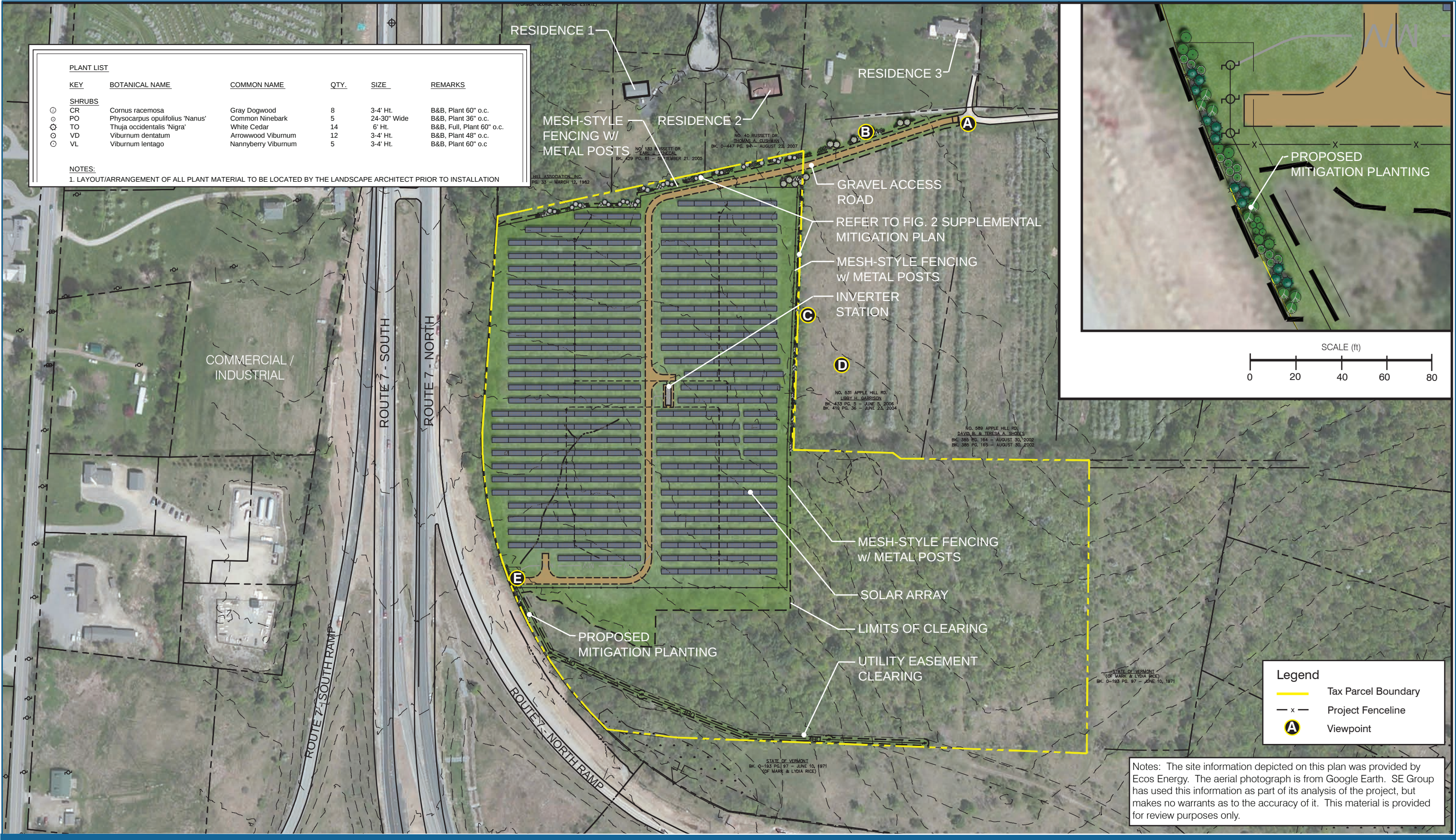
Figure 2 – Supplemental Mitigation Plan

Figure 3 – Supplemental Site Photographs

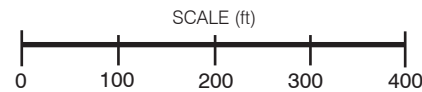
Figure 4 – Supplemental Site Section 1

Figure 5 – Supplemental Site Section 2

Figure 6 – Supplemental 3D Perspective



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SUPPLEMENTAL SITE PLAN | Figure 1

September 2014



Legend

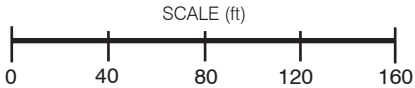
- x — Tax Parcel Boundary
- x — Project Fence

Notes: The site information depicted on this plan was provided by Ecos Energy. The aerial photograph is from Google Earth. SE Group has used this information as part of its analysis of the project, but makes no warrants as to the accuracy of it. This material is provided for review purposes only.

Several areas on this plan are identified for "Supplemental Landscape Mitigation". These are areas where, following clearing of existing vegetation and upon inspection by the Landscape Architect, additional plantings may be installed to help improve screening and mitigate offsite visual impacts. While this plan shows the conceptual layout for such plantings, their exact quantity and placement may be adjusted to reflect the inspection suggested above. The anticipated palette of plant materials shown on the Supplemental Plant List is provided as a reference. These species are native to Vermont and considered hardy and effective for mitigation purposes. The exact species to be installed following inspection of the post-construction site condition will be based on a review of underlying soils, compatibility with existing retained plant materials and screening effectiveness.

SUPPLEMENTAL PLANT LIST:				
KEY	BOTANICAL NAME	COMMON NAME	SIZE	REMARKS
TREES:				
AC	Amelanchier canadensis	Shadblow Serviceberry	8-10' Ht.	B&B, Multi-stem
PG-a	Picea glauca	White Spruce	8-10' Ht.	B&B, Full
PG-b	Picea glauca	White Spruce	6-7' Ht.	B&B, Full
SHRUBS:				
CR	Cornus racemosa	Gray Dogwood	3-4' Ht.	B&B, Plant 60" o.c.
PO	Physocarpus opulifolius 'Nanus'	Common Ninebark	24-30" Wide	B&B, Plant 36" o.c.
TO	Thuja occidentalis 'Nigra'	White Cedar	6' Ht.	B&B, Full, Plant 60" o.c.
VD	Viburnum dentatum	Arrowwood Viburnum	3-4' Ht.	B&B, Plant 48" o.c.
VL	Viburnum lentago	Nannyberry Viburnum	3-4' Ht.	B&B, Plant 60" o.c.
NOTES:				
1. LAYOUT/ARRANGEMENT OF ALL PLANT MATERIAL TO BE LOCATED BY THE LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT PRIOR TO INSTALLATION				

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SUPPLEMENTAL MITIGATION PLAN | Figure 2

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A - VIEW LOOKING WEST FROM BEGINNING OF GRAVEL ACCESS ROAD ON APPLE HILL ROAD TOWARDS THE PROJECT SITE



B - VIEW LOOKING WEST FROM THE NORTH EDGE OF GRAVEL ACCESS ROAD TOWARDS THE PROJECT SITE



C - VIEW LOOKING NORTH AND EAST FROM EDGE OF PROJECT SITE BACK TOWARDS RESIDENCE 3 (SEE FIG. 1)

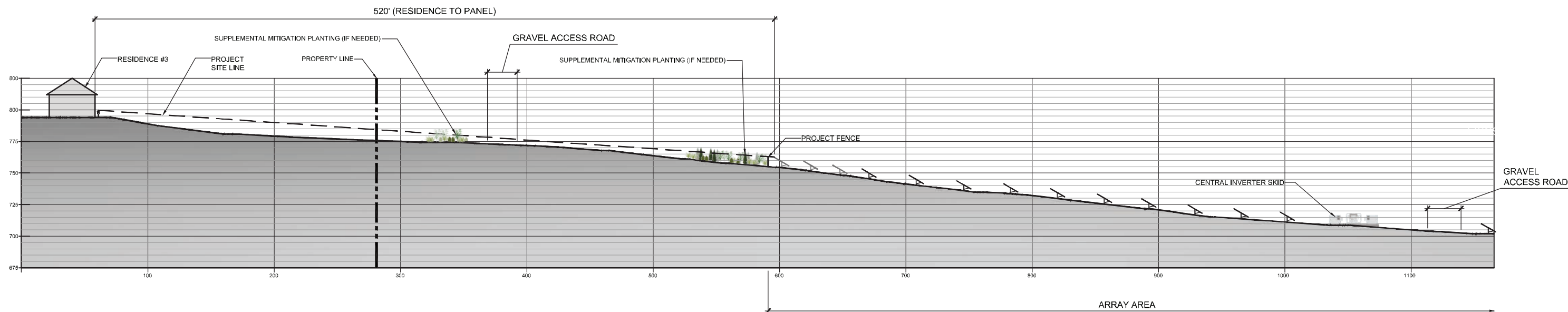


D - VIEW LOOKING NORTH AND WEST FROM APPLE ORCHARD TOWARDS PROJECT SITE



E - VIEW LOOKING NORTH AND WEST OUT FROM THE APPROXIMATE LOCATION OF INTERCONNECTION TOWARDS THE ROUTE 7 NORTH RAMP

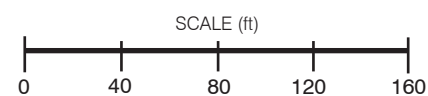
All Photographs taken by SE Group using a Sony SLT A55V camera with a 52mm focal length (35 mm equivalent) on 08/05/2014 from 9:00- 11:00 AM



CROSS-SECTION 1



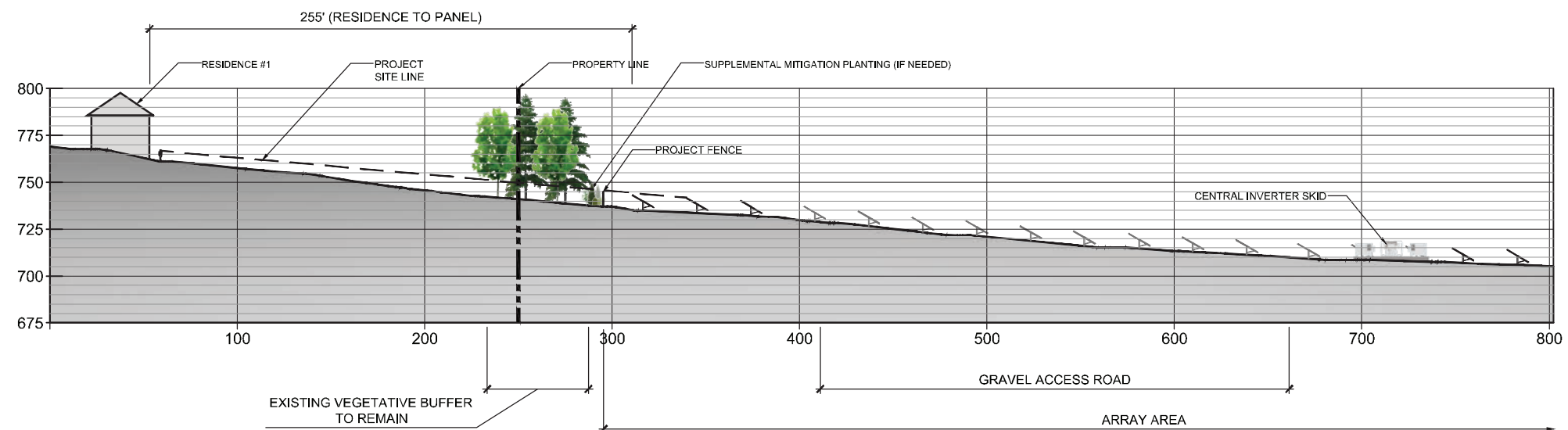
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SUPPLEMENTAL SITE SECTION 1 | Figure 4

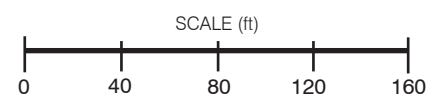
September 2014



CROSS-SECTION 2



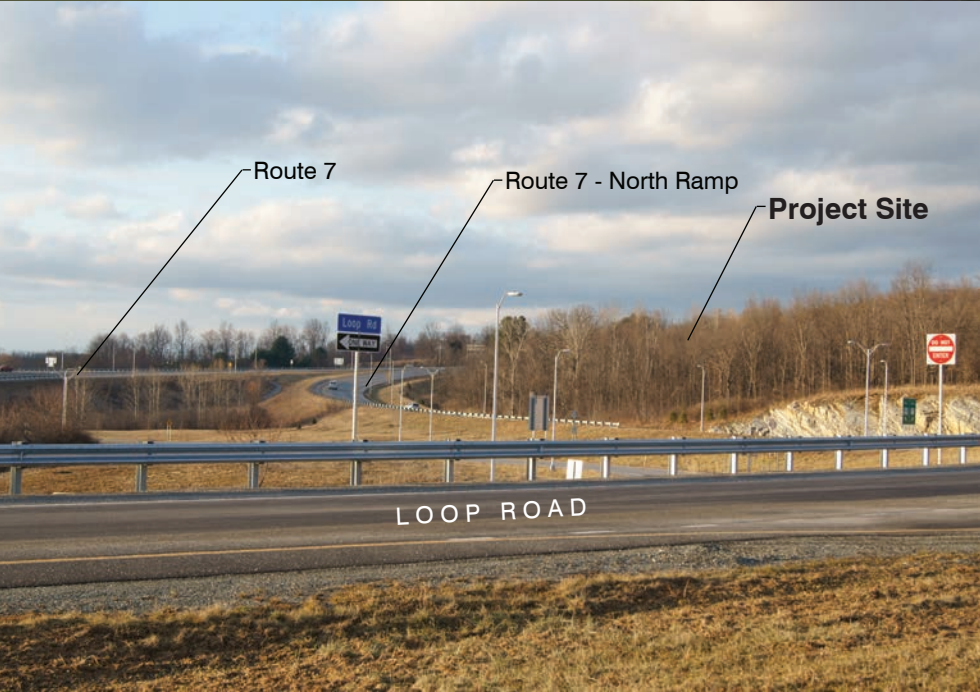
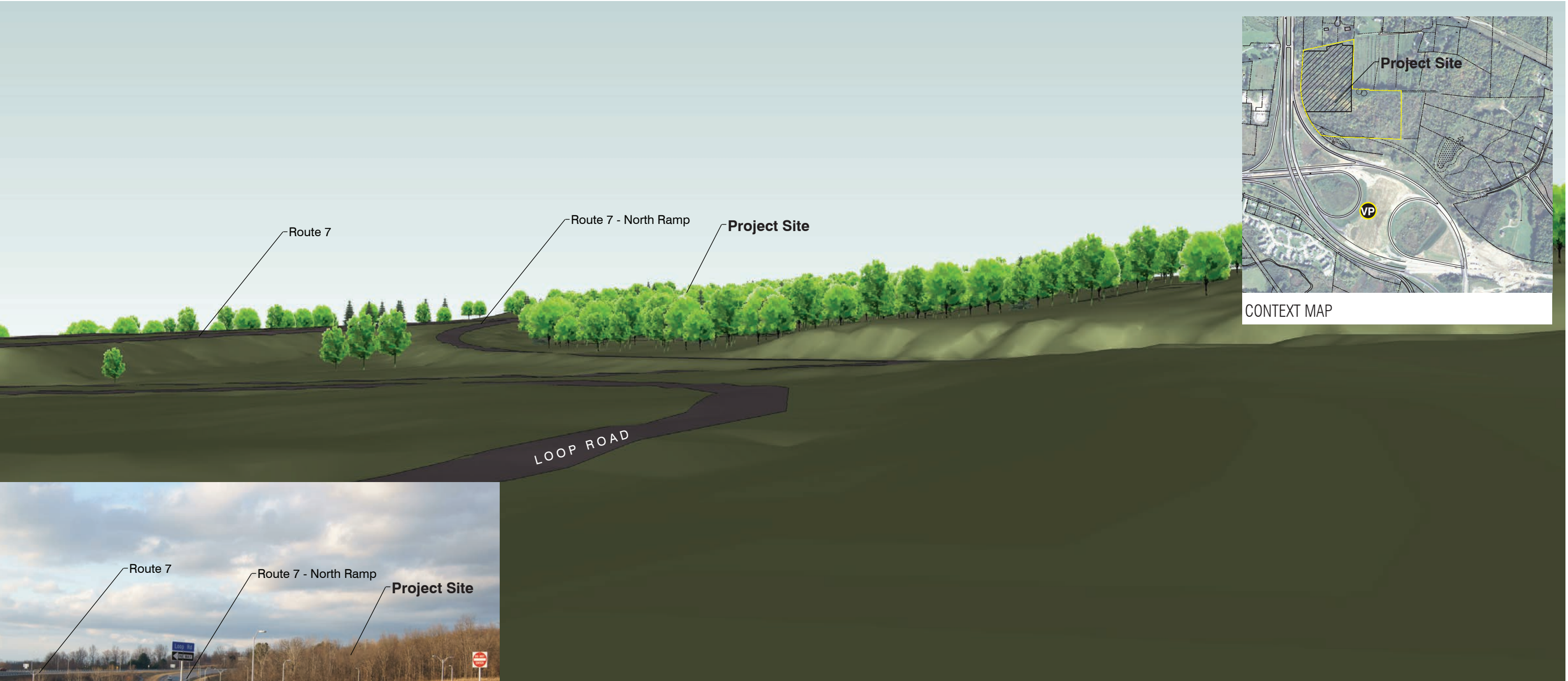
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SUPPLEMENTAL SITE SECTION 2 | Figure 5

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VIEW LOOKING NORTH AND WEST OUT FROM THE PARKING LOT OF THE VERMONT WELCOME CENTER TOWARDS THE ROUTE 7 NORTH RAMP AND THE PROJECT SITE

Notes: The site information depicted on this 3D perspective was provided by Ecos Energy. SE Group has used this information as part of its analysis of the project, but makes no warrants as to the accuracy of it. This material is provided for review purposes only.
 Photograph was taken by SE Group using a Sony SLT A55V camera with a 52mm focal length (35 mm equivalent) on 01/15/2014 at 1:30 PM.