

February 14, 2024 – Work Session

The work session meeting of the Town of Hartland, County of Niagara, State of New York, was held on the above date at the Town Hall, 8942 Ridge Road, Gasport convening at 12:00 p.m.

Members present:

Supervisor: Margaret M. Zaepfel

Town Clerk: Caitlin Clark

Councilman: Joseph Reed

Elizabeth Neadow

Attended by: Sign in sheet attached.

Meeting opens with participants introducing themselves to one another. (:21)

Supervisor Zaepfel and **Deputy Supervisor Neadow** presents a video clip to participants to represent the concerns they have had with industrial solar coming to the Town of Hartland. Deputy Supervisor prefaces video clip by inviting participants to bring video clips representing their concerns to the next meeting. (1:36)

Donna Weeks asks reporter Thomas Tedesco if he will be quoting people during the meeting and states the group was not informed of this. Mrs. Weeks further states “ I also was told this wasn’t a solar meeting but that seems to be your focus”. (11:25)

Deputy Supervisor Neadow expresses this was not the focus of the meeting and anyone is welcome to discuss any topics they feel are important. (11:35)

Supervisor Zaepfel explains the goal of the current administration is to get more public involvement. (12:31)

“We as community leave all the decision making up to certain individuals, and we kind of lose track of what’s going on. As my mother would always say ‘how did that happen’ ya know. The problem is you have to be involved, so we are actively recruiting people to just get involved in their local government and have a voice that’s heard . As you said for every video on this side, there is a video on the opposite side. Unfortunately, there’s usually only one truth. So what we want to do is get the people together in panels and groups to say ok somebody says there is no impact on house values on an issue, this side says yes there is significant impact on house values when/ if this happens. It can’t be both. As a community, as a panel, we want to do the research and find out what is the truth and agree upon it...”

Donna Weeks expressed the current administration’s campaign was run on facts about solar to scare people without knowing if these facts were true. (15:03)

Supervisor Zaepfel responds that the goal is to present facts with research to back up these facts. She further discusses how the citizens committee will determine if there is biases in reports provided with this research. As well as finding new research to base decisions on that may not have been available previously. (15:18)

“I always said I don’t want live a lie. I want to do what’s best for my community, my family, and my country. If I am misinformed, please inform me because I don’t want to live my life that way. That’s basically how I feel about it and that’s why we wanted to bring the citizens together using facts and data we have before us and common sense.”

Deputy Supervisor Neadow explains Andrew Reilley is the engineer for the Town of Hartland from Wendel Engineering who is paid by the town to be our engineer on industrial solar and do all the research associated with industrial solar. **Deputy Supervisor Neadow** quotes Andrew Reilley while talking about industrial solar “ The road to Hell is paved with good intention” (20:22)

Donna Weeks mentions Cornell was asked to be brought in to discuss industrial solar. **Donna Weeks** states “They’re the ones that I can think of that everyone would accept as being non-biased “. (21:00)

Supervisor Zaepfel discusses how a moratorium has been started to research the impact that the solar projects would have on our community. She further talks about how Hartland’s comprehensive plan states that we are to be a rural agricultural community, and how we would have to be re-zoned for industrial areas. **Supervisor Zaepfel** remarks “Having it spread out throughout the whole town means that most of the roads will be affected, the noise, the lines, the property values, there will be more people impacted.” (21:38)

Councilman Reed expresses how as a landowner it is his to privilege to do what he wants to on his land if he wants to use it to turn a profit. **Councilman Reed** states “I pay my taxes, it’s my property now you’re talking about ‘it’s not farmable’, well it is farmable. First of all, we are farming the sun, the sun is given to us by the Lord to in fact supply our homes. Number one. Number two, sheep grazing that’s another thing. They are putting wildflowers in there and they’re running honey from that. See everything is a one sided, it’s no good things. Here are some of the good things about it.” Councilman Reed further continues how there will be 4 full time jobs from this project (not necessarily local). (26:18)

Donna Weeks agrees with Councilman Reed confirming she believes it is taxpayers property to do what they want. She goes on to discuss how we need to progress, we need energy and we can do both farming and have industrial solar. **Donna Weeks** states “We wouldn’t do something that would hurt others. You don’t want to look at it don’t drive by my house.” (28:05)

Supervisor Zaepfel brings up the inverter noise and the need to know from the community if they think that the noise is unreasonable and burdensome to the residents and whether or not it may have health effects on residents. **(31:35)**

Rich Herman suggests pro-solar participants produce a video for the next meeting showing what they believe the benefits of solar are to show the group. **(36:25)**

Supervisor Zaepfel discusses how much the push for solar in this area may be based on money being thrown at a project rather than the viability of the amount of energy and the benefits we will get out of the project. **(38:20)**

Andres Vizcarra thanks Supervisor Zaepfel and Deputy Supervisor Neadow for taking the time to hear opposing few points. He continues to discuss how everyone has their own intrinsic biases on both sides. He discusses the video shown and how he believes the truth can be site specific. **Andres Vizcarra** states “I think we are discounting the farmers that are participating in this as though they don’t understand their own land.”**(38:55)**

Supervisor Zaepfel mentions that 11% of the prime farmland in the Town of Hartland would be covered with this project. **(44:10)**

Deputy Supervisor Neadow discusses how rules are being made by the state that make it nearly impossible to dairy farm. **(44:35)**

Andres Vizcarra brings up how dairy farmers are using solar to stabilize their income so they can continue to produce milk. **(45:40)**

Donna Weeks comments on how the current administration wants small businesses to come to town and agrees that would be great however she does not see that happening and suggests tax money from solar would be beneficial to the town. **Donna Weeks** states “We have nothing to offer anybody, we don’t even have the population to sustain any of these little businesses.” **(46:50)**

Supervisor Zaepfel remarks on technology becoming antiquated and solar panels being left and abandoned without proper funds to upgrade. **(49:20)**

Donna Weeks emphasizes that EDF is not coming and taking residents land away from them, they are asking residents to sign up and they have a choice because the resident owns the property. **(50:05)**

Supervisor Zaepfel comments on how we have zoning laws to guarantee this is an agricultural and residential area to ensure that there will not be an industry next door to your property that will decrease your property value, put your health at risk and destroy your way of life. **(50:20)**

Jeanne Darsow discusses how she has been interested in learning how solar works and had been researching solar grazing with sheep prior to EDF coming the Hartland. She further discusses

agrivoltaics and how farming in tandem with solar can have benefits. “ I don’t know how it is going to deplete the land that much once you take all the concrete and solar panels out and plow it up a couple of different ways. When my sheep have been there and I have been growing crops for forty years that have been shielded by the solar panels to keep the ground moist and everything growing better. You need less chemicals, how is that any worse than growing corn for ethanol?” (53:20)

Supervisor Zaepfel brings up infrastructure and how with the proposed projects on so many different roads they will need to be connected to the transmission lines and contemplates if this comes if this is the best strategy for the community or if this should be consolidated in one area. (60:50)

Deputy Supervisor Neadow thanks the participants for coming stating “Listening to you guys, I learned stuff and I really respect hearing your side. I just want you also to be open to our side too.” (62:55). She goes on to say we need to respect the needs of the whole community. “There are a lot of neighbors that we need to respect their side of it too. I understand it’s your property, I want to be able to do what I want, I want to be able to live free but we need to respect the whole community and try to make this project so it’s as least painful for everyone as possible.” (64:25)

Supervisor Zaepfel- Discusses setbacks and EDF negotiating setbacks and residents signing agreements from EDF offering residents money to agree to industrial solar “These contracts are iron clad and they also go with the property.” (65:45)

Supervisor Zaepfel- Suggests as a committee, looking into people who already have existing solar fields and do research and see if people are happy with the decision to have solar or are regretting the decision as well as battery storage systems. “When they have an abundance they want to store it batteries to when the sun goes down they can draw off the batteries. The batteries have a lot of issues and safety issues for the community.”(68:05)

Supervisor Zaepfel- “With the technology changing, with the batteries, with the fire issues, with the noise issue, with the invertors, the health effects on the people. That’s why the moratorium was put in to get all this information out so we can make intelligent decisions. I ask everybody here to please do as much research as you can and get as much information so we can move forward with this. (71:30)

The meeting ended at 1:13 PM. The next scheduled work session will be February 28, 2024 at 12:00 p. m.

Respectfully submitted:



Caitlin Clark - Town Clerk