

**MINUTES
HOPE TOWNSHIP PLANNING BOARD
REORGANIZATION MEETING
FEBRUARY 6, 2023**

The reorganization and business meeting of the Hope Township Planning Board was held on Monday, February 6, 2023. Attorney Roger Thomas called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. He announced that notice of the meeting was given in compliance with the “Open Public Meetings Act – This meeting has been advertised in accordance with the provisions of the Open Public Meetings Act, Chapter 231, P.L. 1975.” He then led the Board in the pledge to the flag.

Swearing in of Board Members:

Attorney Thomas administered the oath of office to Terry Urfer, Mayor Timothy McDonough, John Koonz, Chris Maier, Steve Larena and Robert May.

Roll Call:

Members present: Brad Bartow, John Koonz, Matthew Koski, Steve Larena, Timothy McDonough, Chris Maier, Donna Marie, Robert May, Betsy Peterson, Terry Urfer.

Members absent: None.

Also Present: Attorney Roger Thomas, Interim Board Secretary Robin Keggan and Stefanie Williams, Board Engineer.

Reorganization:

Election of Chairman

Attorney Thomas called for a nomination for Chairman. Mr. Koonz made the motion to nominate Steve Larena for Chairman. Motion seconded by Mr. Bartow. With there being no further nominations, the nominations were closed. In a roll call vote, all were in favor of nominating Steve Larena as Chairman, with Mr. Larena abstaining.

Election of Vice Chairman

Chairman Larena called for a nomination for Vice Chairman. Mr. Urfer made a motion to nominate Mr. May. Motion was seconded by Mr. Koonz. With there being no further nominations, the nominations were closed. In a roll call vote, all were in favor of nominating Robert May as Vice Chairman, with Mr. May abstaining.

Appointment of Board Professionals:

The Planning Board professionals of Roger Thomas, Board attorney; French & Parrello, Board Engineers and Heyer and Gruel were re-appointed to their positions on the Planning Board by a consent agenda motion, which included adoption of the Resolution naming Board Professionals, made by Mr. Koonz and seconded by Mr. May. In a roll call vote, all members were in favor of retaining the Board professionals.

Appointment of Interim Board Secretary

Mr. Koonz made the motion to appoint Robin Keggan as the Interim Board Secretary. Motion seconded by Mr. May. In a roll call vote, all were in favor.

Designation of Meeting Dates, Time, Place/ Adoption of the Official Newspaper

The Board discussed the July meeting date. It was agreed to set the meetings as per the distributed Resolution, to be revisited later if needed, commencing at 7:00 p.m at the Hope Township Municipal Building, 407 Hope-Great Meadows Road, Hope Township, Warren County, New Jersey unless designated/advertised and announced elsewhere. The official newspapers being the same as the Governing Body: the NJ Herald and the Express Times-NJ Zone edition.

Mr. May made the motion to designate the Date, Time and Place as distributed and to designate the NJ Herald and the Express Times NJ Zone edition for the publication of legal notices and to receive notices pursuant to the Open Public Meetings Act, the same as the Governing Body. Motion seconded by Mr. Koonz. In a roll call vote, all were in favor.

Adoption of "Rules Governing Internal Affairs-Board Bylaws"

Mr. Koonz made the motion to adopt the Rules Governing Internal Affairs-Board Bylaws. Motion seconded by Mr. May. In a roll call vote, all were in favor.

Correspondence:

Mr. Urfer had requested earlier in the day that a Rutgers University Agrivoltaics Program report dated January 7, 2023 be distributed to the Board members for the February 6, 2023 meeting.

Approval of Minutes:

The minutes of December 5, 2022 were distributed prior to the Board meeting. Mr. Maier made the motion to adopt the minutes. Motion seconded by Mr. Koonz. In a voice vote, all were in favor of adopting the minutes, except for Ms. Marie, who was not present at the December meeting and she abstained.

Unfinished Business:

Application No. 2022-02: Matarazzo Solar Farm, LLC – Block 200, Lots 200 & 300

Testimony resumed on this application, with Mr. Bellin presenting the Dual Purpose Plan as requested by the Planning Board.

Mr. Streker of Bohler Engineering was sworn in and reminded he was under oath. He presented the Board with the Dual Purpose Plan being worked on for implementation depending on the subsidy that is put in place (Dual Purpose Plan vs. Grid Supply only

Plan). Mr. Streker introduced Exhibit A-5 “Dual Use Farming Layout Exhibit” dated January 11, 2023. Discussion was had regarding farming underneath the panels and what that would look like. The panels are 15 feet apart, making room for a farmer to be able to maneuver equipment between the rows. The panels area approximately 11’3” from the ground to the bottom of the panel. The solar farm is approximately 26 acres. There are 8 or 9 acres outside of the fenced area that embodies the solar farm. The property would be converted to commercial for taxation purposes. Discussion took place regarding a house that exists on the property and the demolition of it. It was originally planned for demolition, but the applicant is not opposed to leaving it for COAH obligations as long as no variances would need to be applied for. Mr. Thomas noted that the property would be deed restricted for the COAH use. Mr. Bellin noted that while he is not opposed to this occurring, Mr. Matarazzo would need to sign off on it.

Mr. Bartow questioned what testimony the Board is hearing – testimony for Dual Use or Grid Supply. The applicant’s attorney re-iterated that they are asking for both approvals (Dual Purpose and Grid Supply) as they are unsure which way the subsidy will go, although they tend to believe that the lean is more towards the Dual Purpose use. Ms. Peterson questioned whether or not the Board has the power to approve only one of the uses instead of both, to which the applicant’s attorney responded he would hope they would not do that in case the BPU went in the direction of which the Board’s approval was not given, sending them back to re-apply before the Board for that specific use. Ms. Peterson questioned how this will impact homes in the area with their home values and views. Mr. Urfer suggested asking the Township Planner how this will impact the surrounding homes.

Mr. Bartow asked whether or not the Hope Volunteer Fire Department had weighed in on access to the property. Nothing has been submitted to the Board as of this point. Mr. Koonz will find out the status of this.

Mr. Roger Woolf was sworn in as a witness under oath. He is a 5th generation farmer who farms lands in many municipalities. He currently grows corn and soybeans, but stated that farmers are now looking for other opportunities due to the amount of solar farms that are estimated to be put in place. Mr. Woolf has farmed the Matarazzo property for about 25 years. If the dual use purpose is put into place, he would most likely be growing hay and doesn’t anticipate any problems due to the solar panels being in the way or restricting sunlight. Mr. Urfer asked some questions regarding wetland areas on the property and no till farming – no wetlands on the property. Mr. Koonz questioned why Mr. Woolf opted to grow hay if farming occurs under the panels. Mr. Woolf responded he chose that due to the contour of the property and it would not need to be tilled every year. Mr. Larena asked what Mr. Woolf’s alternative plan would be if hay does not work under the panels. Mr. Woolf responded that no till soybean and/or corn would be a possibility. Ms. Peterson questioned if the Hope Township portion of the property would be consistent with the White Township portion of the property as far as dual purpose use vs. grid supply only. Mr. Maier questioned the return on the Mr. Woolf’s investment if he will need to purchase specific equipment to work and maneuver between the solar rows. Mr. Larena questioned if farming in a solar farm field would be more labor intensive to farm. Ms. Williams, the Township engineer, questioned how the farmer would access the back area outside of the solar farm, to which the engineer responded they would be able to put a gate in for him to access same. Mr. Bellin commented on PJM (Penn Jersey Maryland

Interconnection) and the amount of time that will most likely pass (2-3 years) before the solar farm would be built out. PJM is very backlogged with applications, so it will be a couple of years before the applicant learns where he will be able to connect to the grid. The applicant is starting with local board approvals to get the ball rolling so that they are ready to go when guidance finally rolls out.

Mr. Larena opened for public questions to the witness. None were heard. Closed to the public.

Mr. Thomas noted that Exhibit A-5 was not submitted to all the Board members. The engineer will make sure that it is distributed to the members and Board professionals. The stormwater detention basin on the Exhibit was also questioned by Mr. Maier (whether or not it was an obstacle to the farmer). It is 22 feet from the fence surrounding the solar farm to the basin. Mr. Maier also questioned the impact this will have on neighboring properties’ values.

Mr. Bellin stated that the application was now complete and the Board is now free to vote on the preliminary and final site plan application, with no variances or waivers being asked for. Mr. Urfer stated that he was uncomfortable making a motion on this application and made a motion that the Board consider having our Planner attend a meeting. Mr. Maier seconded the motion. By a roll call vote, all were in favor with the exception of Mayor McDonough who departed the meeting around 8:00 p.m.

Other Business:

None

Bills:

NJ Planning Officials

Re: Annual Dues 185.00

French & Parrello

Re: Matarazzo 1605.00

Re: Matarazzo 675.00

Re: Blue Wave Solar 320.00

Roger Thomas

Re: Blue Wave Solar 324.74

Mr. Maier made the motion to approve the vouchers. Motion seconded by Mr. Koonz. In a roll call vote, all were in favor.

Open to the Public:

Chairman Larena opened the meeting to the public. No public comment was heard and the meeting was closed to the public.

Adjournment:

With there being no further business a motion was made and seconded to adjourn the meeting at 8:45 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted:

Robin L. Keggan
Interim Board Secretary