

**MINUTES**  
**HOPE TOWNSHIP PLANNING BOARD MEETING**  
**MARCH 6, 2023**

The business meeting of the Hope Township Planning Board was held on Monday, March 6, 2023. Chairman Larena called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

**Roll Call:**

**Members present:** Brad Bartow, John Koonz, Matthew Koski (arrived at 7:02), Steve Larena, Chris Maier, Donna Marie, Robert May, Betsy Peterson, Terry Urfer.

Members absent: Mayor Timothy McDonough

Mr. Larena then led the Board in the pledge to the flag. The Chairman 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.”

**Correspondence:**

The Chairman briefly noted the various correspondences received by the Planning Board. These correspondences include letters from the Warren County Mosquito Commission; David Hansen, P.E. making notice of a septic repair at 121 Swayze Mill Road, Hope Township; a memo from the Highlands Council pertaining to the scope of work relating to a grant opportunity to study the impacts of warehouses on zoning/municipalities and a memo from Elena Gable, P.P. regarding the Matarazzo Solar Application.

**Approval of Minutes:**

The minutes of the February 2, 2023 reorganization meeting were distributed prior to the Board meeting. Mr. Koonz made the motion to adopt the minutes. Motion seconded by Mr. Bartow. In a voice vote, all were in favor of adopting the minutes with no opposing votes or abstentions.

**New Business: Budget 2023**

After discussion, it was determined to leave the budget at the same amount as 2022. The secretary will get the chairperson the budget figure from last year to determine if this is sufficient.

**Other Business:**

None

**Bills:**

**French & Parrello**

Re: Matarazzo

399.75

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

### **Unfinished Business:**

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

Testimony resumed on this application, with Mr. Bellin referring to Ms. Gable's memorandum submitted to the Board. Mr. Bellin reminded the Board that the application was completed at the last meeting, but carried to this meeting at the Planning Board's request in order to have the Township Planner in attendance. Most of the questions/comments that were on the memorandum had already been testified to in previous meetings, but he is happy to go through each comment and answer or clarify anything needing further information.

Mr. Larena asked Mr. Streker of Bohler Engineering to please come forward in order to be involved in the conversation with Ms. Gable regarding her memo. Mr. Streker was reminded he remained under oath by Board attorney Roger Thomas. Ms. Gable stated they would just go through the memorandum on a per-comment basis and that the applicant professionals could respond. Mr. Streker also handed the Board a larger version of Exhibit A5 so that they were able to see the Dual Purpose Plan easier.

Ms. Gable asked the applicant what would happen if their application was not one chosen by the State of New Jersey to be in the pilot program. Mr. Bellin stated if they were not chosen, they would not be building the solar farm.

Ms. Gable asked for clarification on the type of farmland soils (prime versus statewide importance) on the property. Mr. Streker responded that the soils are prime soils.

A discussion regarding the landscape plan took place. Ms. Gable commented that perhaps a second row of screening should be thought about in order to screen the solar farm better from the surrounding area. Mr. Streker commented that there are 98 plantings proposed as of now on top of the berm. After the construction is done and the plantings are put in place, generally a walk through is done with appropriate personnel from the township involved to ensure that any gaps of significance are dealt with and more plantings can be put in place at that time. Cannot plant too close together or the trees will choke each other out and die. At the time of planting, these trees will be the same height as the panels. Landscaping is an ongoing obligation throughout the course of the project (i.e., when a tree dies it will be replaced).

The 8 foot tall woven wire fence proposed is for security measures only and is required by the electrical code per Mr. Streker's testimony.

Ms. Gable questioned whether or not any trees are proposed to be removed as a result of the solar farm installation. Mr. Streker noted that trees in the field will be removed but the trees around the perimeter of the property will remain.

Ms. Gable questioned whether a lot merger will occur in order to merge the two lots that this application pertains to. Mr. Thomas stated that since the property is owned by the same person, it can be left as is (no merger necessary).

Ms. Gable questioned site lighting. Mr. Streker testified that the only lighting will be by the entry gate on a pole and will be shielded downward. This light will be off most of the time and the field will be dark.

A discussion took place regarding Affordable Housing and a deed restriction being put in place on a house that was originally scheduled to be demolished on this property. Mr. Bellin stated that he would have to obtain permission from the owner for this, but anticipated no problems in doing so. If the applicant were to say no to this condition, then they would need to appear before the Board again since this will be a condition of approval. The deed restriction would be for 30 years regardless of the project's longevity. If the house were to be sold, a subdivision would need to occur. If the house is rented, Mr. Matarazzo would need to maintain the property. Mr. Bellin noted that the house is in the leasehold and there is no proposition to sell, it would be rented. Mr. Matarazzo would serve as the administrator of the unit.

Ms. Gable verified the boundary lines of the property with Mr. Streker.

Ms. Gable questioned any outside agency approvals at this juncture of the application. Mr. Bellin noted that he has not applied in White Township as of yet due to their recent work on zoning, but plans on doing so in the near future. It was verified that an LOI was filed with the DEP and that the applicant has filed with the County (soil conservation).

Mr. Larena asked the Board if they had comments or questions. Ms. Peterson questioned whether Mr. Woolf would continue to be the farmer on the applicant's property. Mr. Bellin said that is his hope, however, it is not guaranteed that it will remain him in the years to come. They will find another farmer if or when that time comes as there are many interested in farming the property.

Mr. Bartow asked Mr. Koonz about the letter that was to be received from the Hope Volunteer Fire Department in reference to this application. Mr. Koonz stated that a letter had been sent. The secretary confirmed that she had not received this letter. Mr. Koonz summarized the letter's contents. The HVFD noted the need for ingress/egress through the fence around the backside of the field should there be an emergency. He also noted that the HVFD has no equipment to fight fires under the panels should one occur. He wanted the applicant to be aware of this. Mr. Bellin stated that the applicant would be willing to meet with the fire department to discuss this and options available. Mr. Bellin also stated that they will have training sessions with all emergency services that would be serving this property location so that they are informed on how to handle any emergency situation(s) should they occur.

Mr. Maier questioned any sound testing that could be done to afford protection for neighbors of the site. Mr. Bellin stated that there is a State code for sound that can be put in as a condition of approval and that the project would not be able to exceed those standards. Mr. Urfer requested that standards be provided to the Board. There will be a sound test done pre-construction so that there is a baseline in place to reference.

A question arose about the soil that would need to be utilized to construct the berm. Mr. Bellin stated that the soil would be imported if necessary and would be certified clean. He was made aware of Hope Township's soil import ordinance by Mr. Urfer.

Mr. Larena questioned if the stumps would be removed where any trees were being taken out. Mr. Streker answered that they would be as to make the farmer's work in the field easier.

Mr. May asked Elena Gable if there have been any studies done regarding the impact of homes looking over a solar farm versus a field. To her knowledge, there has not been.

Mr. Koski verified with the applicant that the property would go from farmland assessed to commercially taxed. Mr. Thomas will put that into the Resolution as a condition as well.

Mr. Urfer questioned how the end of the lease will be handled. A decommissioning plan will be put in place as part of the Developer's Agreement. A bond will be put up with the township as well.

Mr. Larena opened up to the public for questions or comments. Mr. Thomas Bodolsky of Bridgeville Road in Hope Township was sworn in by Roger Thomas. Mr. Bodolsky pointed to the example of the landscape architecture done at the new Quik Chek in Hackettstown as an outstanding example of how screening the solar farm could be undertaken. He urged the Board to consider making a wider berm and more substantial plantings a condition of the approval. A staggered row was offered as an option by the Hope Township Planner in order to offer more "gap" coverage. Mr. Bellin stated that the applicant has no problem working with the professionals as far as the landscape screening is concerned. It was noted that the Township engineer does have a licensed architect on staff and that they will look over the applicant's plan. Mr. Bodolsky noted that the road running along the proposed solar farm field is higher than the field and asked if it was appropriate to ask an engineer for site line profiles. Mr. Streker stated that was testified to at the first hearing.

Hearing no further questions from the public, Chairman Larena closed the meeting to the public.

A motion was made to approve the application subject to certain conditions such as landscaping to meet the satisfaction of the Board and adjusted as necessary; agreement for a decommissioning plan is put into the Developer's Agreement; approved subject to outside agency approvals; Dual Use approval only; lighting will only be on a post by the gate, no other lighting permitted; subject to COAH compliance in accordance with the regulations currently in effect; applicant required to obtain a Permission to Operate (PTO); training for all emergency personnel servicing the applicant's property; applicant to abide by the State sound code with an initial baseline test being conducted; conditions run with the land, not the owner; farmland assessment will change to commercially taxed and also subject to the soil import ordinance of Hope Township.

Mr. Urfer made a motion to approve the application with conditions stipulated by the Board attorney. Ms. Marie seconded. In a roll call vote, the following were in favor of the application passing: Mr. Bartow, Mr. Koonz, Mr. Koski, Ms. Marie, Ms. Peterson, Mr. Urfer and Mr. Larena, with Mr. May opposing and Mr. Maier abstaining.

Ms. Gable touched on the grant being offered to municipalities to study the effects of warehousing on their communities. She will work up a scope of work and cost estimate. Mr. Thomas will look over the agreement and speak with the Township attorney, Michael Selvaggi, regarding same as well. Both of these actions will occur before the Township Committee signs the agreement for the \$5,000 grant.

A motion was made that Mr. Thomas review the agreement with Mr. Selvaggi and then report back to the Board, as well as Ms. Gable putting together a cost estimate and scope of work before the Township committee would sign the agreement by Mr. Urfer. This was seconded by Mr. May. In a roll call vote, the following were in favor of this motion: Mr. Bartow, Mr. Koonz, Mr. Koski, Mr. Maier, Ms. Marie, Mr. May, Ms. Peterson, Mr. Urfer and Mr. Larena.

**Adjournment:**

With there being no further business, a motion was made by Mr. May and seconded by Mr. Koonz to adjourn the meeting at 8:36 p.m. All in favor by voice vote.

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Respectfully Submitted:

Robin L. Keggan  
Interim Board Secretary