

**Jefferson County Industrial Development Agency
Special Board Meeting Minutes
April 15, 2021**

The Jefferson County Industrial Development Agency held a special board meeting on Thursday, April 15, 2021 in the board room at 800 Starbuck Avenue, Watertown, NY and via zoom.

Present: W. Edward Walldroff, Paul Warneck

Zoom: David Converse, Chair, Lisa LøHuillier

Excused: John Jennings, Robert E. Aliasso, Jr., William Johnson **Absent:** None

Also Present: Marshall Weir, Lyle Eaton, Peggy Sampson, Jay Matteson, Ron Robbins, Brian Robbins

Zoom: Christine Powers, Rob Aiken, John Wagner, Doug Shelmidine, Keir Chapman

- I. **Call to Order:** Chairman Converse called the meeting to order at 8:00 a.m.
- II. **Pledge of Allegiance**
- III. **Public Comment:** Mr. Converse invited guests to speak.

Ron Robbins ó Mr. Robbins said that he appreciates that the board is making the effort to bring information forward in regard to siting solar here in the county. He said that he is one of the potential impacted landowners in the county, so he has a vested interest in the whole endeavor and the decision that will be made accordingly. He said that its important for the views of the Farmland Protection Board and Farm Bureau (he has been a longtime member) put a lot of credence in policy they bring forward, so he thinks its important for those views to be heard. He suggested that the board make efforts to seek out other views such as impacted landowners be sought and heard as well. He said that the ag sector in the northeast are challenged. He said that he is open to offer his opinion and expertise to help meet some of the challenges and decisions.

- IV. **Special Business:** The purpose of the special meeting between the JCIDA Board of Directors and representatives of the Jefferson County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board and Jefferson County Farm Bureau is to discuss their concerns, policies and recommendations regarding solar project development on important farmland soils in Jefferson County.

Doug Shelmidine (Chairman, Jefferson County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board) – Mr. Shelmidine said that he works to keep agriculture viable in his off time. He said that the board received a letter regarding a policy that the Farmland Protection Board (FPB) came up with recently. He said that they have an advisory role to the board of legislators. He said that he is a firm believer in property rights as long as no one is being harmed, including natural resources. He indicated that there are many locations that are suitable for solar and wondered why developers are avoiding them. He said that prime farmland should have protection. He said that he is concerned because prime ag soil is the greatest resource. He said that the destruction of prime ag soil allowing large solar development and giving them subsidies and incentives with public monies isn't appropriate. He said that once these projects are built on the soil, he doesn't believe there is any way the resource can be brought back into production. He thinks that large scale projects will exacerbate the trend of consolidation of dairy farms and force more families off the farm. He said that in 40 to 50 years we will be the rust belt of the state. He doesn't think its appropriate to give tax breaks to destroy one of our most valuable resources and suggested a moratorium until more information is gathered.

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Mr. Warneck asked Mr. Shelmidine if he sees a big impact with community solar projects versus utility scale projects. Mr. Shelmidine said that he had the opportunity along with almost every other landowner in the county for a community solar project, but indicated that he chose not to. He said he is for community solar if they are properly sited and are on less than prime land. He said that he is concerned when they start taking large tracks of land and producing power that's going to be exported out of the area. Mr. Warneck said that the board is trying to learn what the issues are to prepare for these projects.

Mr. Walldroff asked if the criteria of soil types are a true reflection of prime farmland. Mr. Matteson said the science is behind classifying those categories. Mr. Walldroff asked what happens with the siting process if part of the parcel is prime farmland. Mr. Shelmidine said that if part of the site is prime soils then those are better sites than large tracts of prime soil.

John Wagner (Deputy Director of Member Relations for the New York Farm Bureau) Mr. Wagner said that he works with upstate landowners to protect farmland. He said that they are an educational resource for farm and landowners. Mr. Wagner said that policies are developed from the county grassroots level and move up. He referenced some of their policies regarding solar. He said that they recommend policies on mitigation. Mr. Wagner said that Elizabeth Wolters from the Albany office works through regulatory policies.

Mr. Warneck asked if Mr. Wagner can share his book of policies electronically. Mr. Wagner said that he will send it to Jay who can highlight application areas to share with board members.

Mr. Warneck noted that it will be hard to move forward until we know what the new legislation on the method on taxation will be.

Mr. Aiken asked if there are training sessions available to educate members, like Tug Hill does during their yearly conference. Mr. Wagner said that they created training materials and worked with assessors in the past. Mr. Matteson said that he has worked with the Jefferson County Planning Department for ag workshops.

Mr. Walldroff said our only lever to influence is taxation. He asked if DEC has an influence on siting and wondered if they are going to be an active player for siting. Mr. Wagner said that DEC's focus is on wetlands, but need to move more towards soil health.

Mr. Warneck asked if there will be an impact on carbon sequestration. Mr. Shelmidine said he thinks so. He said that it is easier for developers to go where DEC won't say anything.

Mr. Walldroff said that with local zoning laws, those boards can start/stop projects, but under the new process there is no role for them. He said this leaves very few tools in the toolbox. Mr. Warneck noted that all the solar projects the board approved so far have gone through local zoning which made it easier.

Mr. Converse said it behooves us to work with the legislators and county officials. He said that he is not a proponent with regulating what people do with their own property. He said that we need to continue to gather as much information as we can.

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Mr. Robbins said that all impacted parties should be engaged in deep conversation about this topic. He said not to lose sight of expertise we have in the county. He said that we should look at the bigger picture ó create income stream, face regulatory burdens, and labor issues. He said to take a broad view of the issue and study it without bias.

- V. **Adjournment:** With no further business before the board, a motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Warneck, seconded by Ms. LøHuillier. The special meeting adjourned at 8:56 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Peggy Sampson