

**Jefferson County Industrial Development Agency
Special Board Meeting Minutes
May 13, 2021**

The Jefferson County Industrial Development Agency held a special board meeting on Thursday, May 13, 2021 in the board room at 800 Starbuck Avenue, Watertown, NY and via zoom.

Present: David Converse, Chair,

Zoom: Lisa LøHuillier, John Jennings, Robert E. Aliasso, Jr., William Johnson, W. Edward Walldroff, Paul Warneck

Excused: None

Absent: None

Also Present: David Zembiec, Marshall Weir, Lyle Eaton, Peggy Sampson, Jay Matteson, Rob Aiken

Zoom: Elizabeth Wolters, John Wagner, Doug Shelmidine, Brittany Davis, Mike Bourcy, Katie Malinowski, Adam Miner, Robert Hagemann, Darren Suarez, Andrew Buckley, Greg Gardner, Ron Robbins

I. Call to Order: Chairman Converse called the meeting to order at 8:03 a.m.

II. Pledge of Allegiance

III. Public Comment: Mr. Converse invited guests to speak.

Darren Suarez (Boralex) ó Mr. Suarez said that they have two projects in Jefferson County ó one in the Town of Hounsfield and the other in the Town of Watertown and noted that they have been in NYS for the last 20 years. He said that Boralex is happy to address any concerns; is willing to design projects to accommodate crop production; and noted that we should work together for the betterment of the community.

IV. Special Business: The purpose of the special meeting is to discuss the impact of solar projects on prime farmland.

Mr. Matteson introduced Elizabeth Wolters who is the Deputy Director of Public Policy for NY Farm Bureau. He said that today's meeting will be an open discussion and invited board members and guests to ask questions/make comments.

Ms. Wolters started by saying that the state has set a big goal for solar development. She said the conversations come up because farmland is a good place to site solar since its flat and gets sun. She said that they mitigate the impacts and seek input from other state agencies such as DEC and Ag and Markets.

Mr. Warneck asked how Ms. Wolters sees the ORES siting process ó as in removing the local input. Ms. Wolters said that she doesn't have a good answer, but noted that there is some consideration to local zoning.

Mr. Warneck said that we are waiting for the outcome of the state review. He said that he is at a loss on how to proceed with large scale projects and is nervous about the ORES outcome.

**Jefferson County Industrial Development Agency
Special Board Meeting Minutes
May 13, 2021**

Ms. Wolters said that NYSERDA has several Technical Working Groups (TWIG) and now has the A TWIG which is an ag tech working group. She said they had their first meeting recently to discuss siting on farmland. Ms. Malinowski indicated that the Tug Hill Commission is a part of the group.

Mr. Aliasso is of the opinion that solar and farming can't co-exist and wonders what will happen to the north country when there are several renewable projects with no jobs.

Ms. Wolters said the land that is targeted is due to land availability and connectivity. She said it presents opportunity for leasing rights. She said to look at the aspects to co-exist (i.e. sheep grazing).

Mr. Gardner joined the meeting at 8:29 a.m.

Mr. Aliasso thinks that Jefferson County is going to see some major impacts. Ms. Wolters said that it is hard to do a statewide policy. Mr. Aliasso said that we have tried to control where development is sited; however, the development is so far ahead.

Mr. Walldroff said that we try to determine the risk/benefits. He said that solar panel siting is a revenue generator and host community agreements is a public benefit.

Mr. Warneck pointed out that our only tool is to incentivize.

Ms. Malinowski mentioned that the Tug Hill helped the Town of Watertown develop their solar policy.

Mr. Converse left the meeting at 8:44 a.m.

Mr. Warneck said that the impact on the local ag base should be considered. Ms. Wolters said that the impact should be looked at and said that its good policy to review everything.

Mr. Jennings said that the state is pushing to move everything to electric.

Ms. Malinowski said that 3,000 megawatts of solar has been installed according to the NYSERDA website. Mr. Suarez said that the 6,000 megawatt goal is only for DG (small scale).

Mr. Walldroff said that it frustrates him that the utilization of rooftop solar is lacking from the conversation. He thinks it could hit the state's goal without using farmland. Mr. Jennings commented that it could be an infrastructure challenge and cause major renovations.

Mr. Warneck asked if there is a role for Ag and Markets. Ms. Wolters said that they should be involved with the discussions.

Mr. Gardner asked if there are any studies or an awareness of solar economic impact versus farming and asked what happens to other industries when solar is developed on farmland. Mr. Wolters said that she is not aware of any but will look into it.

Mr. Jennings left the meeting at 9:01 a.m.

**Jefferson County Industrial Development Agency
Special Board Meeting Minutes
May 13, 2021**

Mr. Matteson encouraged all of today's guests to become a member of the Farm Bureau since they are membership based.

At this time, Mr. Matteson reviewed his PowerPoint presentation about the disincentive model. He said that the disincentive model proposal is to apply an increase of 30% - 50% increase over the base payment price (\$5,500/MW for prime and prime-if-drained farmland). He said that we are trying to find a balance. Mr. Warneck pointed out that we are in the middle of revising our current UTEP. Mr. Zembiec said that the current UTEP does not allow for utility scale projects. Mr. Aliasso said the model gets us closer to 50% abatement.

Mr. Gardner said that he doesn't like the "disincentive" word because it sounds negative. It was asked if this model will effectuate change. Mr. Suarez pointed out that developers spend about two years obtaining land and completing the research before they are brought forth; therefore, developers will have to look at the entire economics and assessed value before they make a choice.

- V. **Adjournment:** With no further business before the board, a motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Warneck, seconded by Mr. Aliasso. The special meeting adjourned at 9:43 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Peggy Sampson