

**ONEIDA CHARTER TOWNSHIP
PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES**

April 4, 2017

**MEMBERS PRESENT: WALTERS, SCHERER, STARR,
SCHROEDER, GREEN, KILGORE AND SCHULTZ**

MEMBERS EXCUSED: NONE

**OTHERS PRESENT: ZONING ADMINISTRATOR
GOSCHKA, CLERK CAMPBELL, TRUSTEE LAWRY,
TRUSTEE CAMPBELL, TRUSTEE O'MALLEY,
REPRESENTATIVES OF THE GERONIMO ENERGY
COMPANY, RESIDENTS OF BENTON TOWNSHIP, CITY
OF GRAND LEDGE, RESIDENTS OF ONEIDA TOWNSHIP
AND RESIDENTS OF THE PROPOSED AREA FOR THE
SOLAR FARM DEVELOPMENT.**

1. Chairman Walters called the meeting to order at 7:30 P.M.
2. The Agenda was approved with the amendment moving item 4. Approval of Minutes of March 7, 2017 ahead of item 3. Public Comment. Motion for approval was made by Mr. Green and supported by Mr. Kilgore.
3. Minutes of March 7, 2017 were approved as amended in a motion made by Mrs. Schroeder and supported by Mr. Kilgore. Motion Carried.
4. Public Comment: Chairman Walters explained that speaking time would be limited to three minutes and presentations to ten minutes for this first period of Public Comment so as to allow everyone to be heard. He then asked for Public Comment. Mr. Coakley came forward and made a power point presentation addressing the Master Plan and its reference to protection of prime farmland in

the Township and the Zoning Ordinance reference to the use of Agricultural lands. He did not feel that solar farms met the requirements for Agricultural zoning. He showed maps of the proposed area and stated that the proposed size was a mile and one third long each direction.

Next Mrs. Deer Hall spoke in reference to section 15.03 of the Zoning Ordinance. (General Standards). She read from the Section regarding each Special Land use and meeting these standards each site will meet the conditions of this Section of the Ordinance, so as to be harmonious with and appropriate in appearance with the existing or intended character of the general vicinity and not change the essential character of the area in which it is proposed.

Most of those present felt that the area where Geronimo wants to establish solar farms should be kept farmland. And made that known to the Commission. A resident noted that any ordinance would be setting a precedent. Mr. Starr said that had already been done when the Wind Turbine Ordinance was adopted. Chairman Walters pointed out that this is a commission appointed by the Township Board and that we only recommend to the Township Board who will make the final decision.

Mrs. Schroeder felt that we should consider what is going to happen in the future and what is in store for our children and grandchildren. Where is electricity going to come from in the future?

Mrs. Deer Hall asked if the Solar Farm would stay in the Township.

Chairman Walters explained the purpose of the Zoning Ordinance. It regulates the use and character of the property, the fitness for uses, and checks to see that the use fits with the Master Plan. It creates restrictions and guidelines for general construction and development and it creates orderly growth and change. He also explained that we cannot zone so as to exclude or we could be sued.

Mr. Starr explained that it took over a year to develop the Master Plan and the input came mainly from the Residents of the Township and we need to pay attention to them.

Resident and Planning Commission Chairman of Benton Township stated he felt that the Solar project was an industrial complex. He had questioned the cost of a megawatt at the last meeting and did not receive an answer. But he found the answer in National Geographic. It costs \$100.00 per megawatt and gas cost \$75.00 a megawatt, coal \$60.00 a megawatt. The State said we have to have 15% renewable energy. The Rate payers will pay for solar down the road. He felt that the cheapest source of energy was coal and China is buying up all it can.

Another resident of the Township asked why Geronimo hadn't come for rezoning prior to purchasing land and planning this project. The land is now A-1 Agricultural and they want to have an Industrial use. He felt that they needed a zoning change to industrial to locate industrial solar farms in an Agricultural area.

Chairman noted that this meeting is only to decide if an Ordinance to regulate Solar Farms is needed.

Mrs. Scherer felt that if we were going to deal with Solar Farms we needed an ordinance to set guidelines for this use. There was discussion on the Wind and Solar uses and Alternative Energy Ordinances.

Mr. Green said he was in favor of alternative or renewable energy, but he felt that it belonged in an industrial area. Mr. Kilgore and Mrs. Schultz agreed. Mr. Starr noted that if a solar farm went belly up we needed a way to deal with it and protect and restore the site.

Chairman Walters felt that we needed an Ordinance for the following reasons:

1. To Regulate solar farm establishment.
2. To avoid exclusionary zoning challenges.
3. To balance renewable energy interests and to preserve farmland.
4. To support the Township's Master Plan.
5. To control negative impact on Township Residents.

After discussion, Motion was made by Mrs. Scherer to recommend to the Township Board that an Ordinance to regulate Solar developments be adopted. Support was given to the Motion by Mr. Green. Motion Carried.

A Grand Ledge Resident stated that she agreed and felt that an Ordinance was needed.

There was discussion on how to develop an Ordinance that would guarantee companies had the ability to complete or erect the project. A Bond was discussed.

The reason for Geronimo wanting to locate in this area is the existing sub-station in the Township. But they could locate anywhere and run transmission lines to the sub-station.

There was discussion on the difference in the impact on the farmland between wind farms and solar farms. There was also a discussion about the impact on property values with the placement of the solar farms. One Resident said they are not farms they do not produce food. Setbacks were discussed as were restoration of sites after wind farms and solar farms.

Geronimo Representatives said that most areas allow Solar Farms in Agricultural areas. They said the reason they don't usually locate in Industrial areas is that they generally have water and sewer and Municipalities want to save that area for industries that need those facilities. They also discussed other uses allowed in Agricultural areas such as golf courses and animals.

Chairman and Mr. Starr assured people present that their concerns and desires had been heard and will be addressed and incorporated into the Proposed Ordinance. Mr. Green reminded those present that it would be a long haul, it could be up to 5 or 6 months, but they would have input throughout the process.

There was further discussion on placement of Solar Farms such as Brownfield areas, roof tops and state and federal lands. Geronimo said they had already been down those roads and they would not work.

Mr. Burman discussed an area that used solar panels to build road ways, he felt that there would be many less intrusive means for solar energy in the future. He felt that the Board should take a long look at other means before writing this Ordinance.

Mrs. Deer Hall gave a short history of the Township and the area where the Solar Farms are proposed. She also discussed the preservation of farmland. She noted that the people have worked hard to preserve the farmland, she discussed the long effort to keep I-69 from coming through the farmland by the Farmers, they fought for years to keep the farmland. She said there is a rich heritage in the Township and it is shown by the input into the Master Plan.

Mr. Starr told those present that he was amazed at what could have been a hostile situation being handled with such kindness and consideration and he thanked those present for that.

6. Public Comment Finish, Chairman Walters asked if anyone else wanted to speak. They did not.
7. Any Other Business: There was none.
8. The Meeting was adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Jan Schultz.

APPROVED:

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Michael Walters", is written over a horizontal line.

MICHAEL WALTERS, CHAIRMAN