

Town of Canton Planning Board

Meeting Minutes

October 2, 2023

Municipal Boardroom - 60 Main Street, Canton

6:00pm

Members Present

Chairperson Ian MacKellar, Eric Barr, John Casserly, Betsy Hodge, William Myers, Dakota Casserly (alternate)

Members Absent

Sigie Barr (alternate)

Others Present

Code Enforcement Officer Michael McQuade; Tom Graser (Zoom); Deb Bridges (Zoom)

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:02pm by Chairperson Ian MacKellar.

Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was approved by the Planning Board for the meeting.

Public Comment

Chairperson MacKellar opened the public comment period reminding people to state their name and where they are from, and keep their comments pertinent to the agenda topics at hand while adhering to the three minute time limit, and their comments will be added to the record.

Toby Irven

Mr. Irven discussed the existence of the Town's Complete Streets Task Force, and its role as it relates to the Town Planning Board. A Town Board resolution from 2016 was recommended for circulation to the Planning Board. It was noted that the Planning Board and Complete Streets have not engaged prior to this, and this would be a good opportunity to bring the Planning Board up to date on what Complete Streets is doing. According to Mr. Irven, the task force is a resource made up of volunteers whose sole purpose is to look at roads and trails in the town and make recommendations to address problems. He noted that the task force holds their meetings on the 2nd Monday of each month and these can be found on the municipal calendar.

Meeting Minutes

The following meeting minutes were reviewed by the Planning Board for approval:

- July 10, 2023
- August 7, 2023
- September 5, 2023

A motion was made by Eric Barr to approve all three sets of minutes as written; the motion was seconded by John Casserly and carried.

Agenda Items

1. Old Business

a. Public Hearing - Grassy Grove Solar Project (268 State Highway 310, Canton)

- The hearing was called to order by chairperson Ian MacKellar at 6:08pm
- Public Comment was as follows:
 - Several extensive emails were received by the Planning Board regarding the proposed project; some were against the project while others were for the project. Mr. MacKellar stated that although the emails were too lengthy to be read at the meeting, copies will be shared with the recording secretary for attachment to the meeting minutes.
 - It was noted by the Planning Board that the project progression is expected to go as follows:
 - SEQR Part I coordinated review period ends October 12, 2023.
 - SEQR Part II & III could potentially be reviewed at the November 2023 meeting of the Planning Board.
 - The site plan and special use permit could potentially be reviewed and voted on at the November 2023 meeting as well.
 - The developer noted that they were happy to answer any questions, and that they had not yet seen the email comments sent to the Planning Board. These will be shared for review. The comment letter from solar engineers Barton & Loguidice has been received by the developer and they are working on their updates and responses as requested. This is anticipated to be completed and submitted with time for review prior to the next meeting.
 - The developer offered the following comments regarding the process with National Grid:
 - For Grassy Grove East, the interconnection study was received a few months ago.
 - For Grassy Grove West, the interconnection study was just received, and several details are still being worked out with the utility.
 - Upgrades will be required in order to proceed with the project; the developers are working through a process to cost-share some of these upgrades.
 - This information will be provided to the Town Planning Board in the next project submission.
 - Regarding the timeline for the project, NexAmp has 60-90 business days to put down the official deposit for the project, and they are working on clarifying this.
 - Resident Joel Howie offered the following comments:
 - Mr. Howie asked about the County Planning Board review of this project, and the Board noted that the County denied the project, but the report is not yet available. The County indicated that the location on Prime Agricultural land is problematic, which is a consistent ruling for them.
 - The developers commented that a solar farm project such as this creates minimal disturbance to the site, and no prime soils actually leave the site at any time. The solar farm is a temporary structure with a removal plan for 30 years. The developer feels that the project is satisfactory under Town Code, and can be approved should the Town Planning Board feel it appropriate to do so. Some

mitigations have already been discussed for implementation should the project be approved.

- Resident Lyne Soulia offered the following comments:
 - Ms. Soulia requested introductions to those who were at the meeting for the solar project developers; this was done.
 - Ms. Soulia also asked about how more information can be obtained on potential projects and other details, such as the project on County Route 27. Ms. Soulia specifically asked about the potential to share this information more broadly, including utilization of the Facebook page.
- Resident Peggy Hayes offered the following comments:
 - Ms. Hayes asked about the current zoning for the proposed project; it was noted that under current zoning regulations this is an allowed use at this location. However, under the new zoning regulations which are currently in review with the Town Board, this would change.
- Resident Joel Howie offered the following additional comments:
 - Mr. Howie asked about the Comprehensive Plan and how that plays into the decision making for these solar projects; he noted that he wanted to make sure appropriate decisions are being made with this planning document in mind. It was noted that the Comprehensive Plan is under review with the Town Board and has been taken into consideration.

As there was no additional public comment, the public hearing was closed at 6:40pm.

b. Resolution to Approve Site Plan - 6182 US Highway 11

- The following general information was shared regarding this project:
 - This project is located at the former Frazer Motors site on Route 11.
 - This process involves only a site plan review; no SEQR review is required.
 - Copies of the site plan were distributed to the Planning Board members.
 - The following work has been completed on site:
 - Asbestos abatement has been completed on the former house on location.
 - Tree work has been done to improve clearance on the current farm access road.
 - The developer is working with Ryan Morrison from the DOT in Watertown to address any issues.
 - It was noted that the speed limit at this particular location is 55 mph.
 - Mr. Frazer and Les Baker (developer) have been in contact with the DOT regarding improvements to the old farm access road and updating the entrance to the former Frazer Motors site.
 - Dakota Casserly noted the lack of any turning lane at this location; it was noted that there is already an issue with traffic going in and out in this area and this will be something for the State DOT to address.
 - Spectrum has completed the burial of an internet cable on site.
 - Demolition of the current structure is scheduled for later this week, and architect Brooks Washburn is currently working on the plans for the proposed restaurant.
- The resolution was read aloud by Chairperson MacKellar for the benefit of the Planning Board and the public.
- Chairperson Ian MacKellar officially abstained from the voting process on this project due to the proximity of the proposal to his personal residence.

A motion was made by John Casserly to approve the resolution to approve the site plan as proposed by the developer; the motion was seconded by Eric Barr. All in favor; motion carried. The resolution was signed by all members of the Planning Board and a copy is attached to these minutes.

2. New Business

a. Solar Project Updates

- No new news is available on the proposed solar project at 295 State Highway 310 since the Planning Board denied the proposal of a new entrance off State Street.

b. No Dogs Left Behind

- It was noted that there are no official updates for the Planning Board on this project at this time; however a letter has been sent by Roger Linden and a copy is attached to these minutes. It was also mentioned that a couple of noise complaint tickets have been issued, and a court hearing will be scheduled.

c. Zoning Code Updates

- A meeting of the Town Board on October 10th is anticipated to begin with a public hearing regarding the proposed changes to the Zoning Code; the hearing is scheduled for 6:15pm.

d. A FOIL request has been received by the Town Clerk and will be distributed to the members of the Planning Board for assistance in the response.

Public Comment

Chairperson MacKellar opened the second public comment period of the meeting; no additional public comment was offered.

Next Meetings

Upcoming meetings of the Town Planning Board are tentatively scheduled as follows:

- November 6, 2023 at 6:00pm - discussion of the proposed solar project at 268 State Highway 310

These meetings will be held in the boardroom of the municipal building at 60 Main Street, Canton. The option to participate remotely will be made possible by way of Zoom Virtual Meeting.

Public Comment

Chairperson MacKellar opened the second public comment period; at this time no public comment was offered and the public comment period was closed.

Adjournment

A motion was made to adjourn the meeting by John Casserly; the motion was seconded by William Myers and carried. The meeting was adjourned at 7:00pm.

Date: February 19, 2024

Jeni Reed
Recording Secretary

Town of Canton Planning Board
Site Plan Approval

Project: New Restaurant at 6182 USH 11

Referred to

Action Taken

St Lawrence County Planning ☐

See Attached

Town of Canton Planning ☐

This Site Plan Approval shall be valid for a period of one (1) year from the date it is issued, unless the Applicant applies in writing to the Planning Board for a one-year extension at least thirty (30) days prior to the initial expiration period; and

This Approval shall be filed in the office of the Town of Canton Town Clerk within five (5) days of the date of this Approval and shall be mailed to the Applicant within the same five (5) day period.

The foregoing Approval was voted upon with members of the Town of Canton Planning Board voting and signing as follows:

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Abstain/Absent</u>	<u>Signature</u>
Ian MacKellar , Chairperson	_____	_____	<u>0,</u>	<u>Ian MacKellar</u>
Eric Barr	<u>X</u>	_____	<u>1</u>	<u>Eric C. Barr</u>
William Myers	<u>X</u>	_____	<u>1</u>	<u>William Myers</u>
Betsy Hodge	<u>X</u>	_____	<u>1</u>	<u>Betsy F. Hodge</u>
John Casserly	<u>X</u>	_____	<u>1</u>	<u>John Casserly</u>
Sigie Barr (Alternate)	_____	_____	<u>1</u>	_____
Dakota Casserly (Alternate)	_____	_____	<u>1</u>	_____

Dated: 10/2/23

Town of Canton, New York

Ian MacKellar

Ian MacKellar, Chairperson
Town of Canton Planning Board

Approved



Date:

10/2/2023

Conditions

Denied



Date:

Reason

September 27, 2023

Mr. Ian Mackellar
Planning Board Chairperson
Town Of Canton
60 Main Street
Canton, NY 13617

RE: Grassy Grove East & West Solar Projects
On The Hayes Farm
268 Route 310, Canton NY.

Dear Planning Board,

Thank you for reviewing Nexamp's proposal to install two 5-Megawatt Community Solar Projects on my 93 acre farm, located at 268, Rt. 310, Canton NY. My husband, John F. Hayes, and I purchased the farm in 1971 and operated the dairy farm until his death, 15 years ago.

Over the past 15 years, the farm has provided only minimal revenue for me as the land has been leased to local commercial farmers for less than \$5,000 annually. This minimal amount of revenue from the agricultural leases is not sufficient to sustain the farm and my ability to continue to live on it. Therefore, the opportunity to secure more lease money from a Solar company will save the Hayes Farm and allow me to live out the rest of my life on the property, that I have lived at for the past 52 years.

I understand the County is interested in saving prime farmland for the Commercial Farmers in the region. However, what about the Elderly Farmers that worked their entire life on this farmland? Shouldn't they too get the opportunity to continue to live on their farms and secure a sufficient income through the lease of their lands to other commercial parties that can offer a lease payment that is a sustainable income?

So, I ask that all members of the Town Planning Board understand that Nexamp's Solar projects will save the Hayes Farm for me and allow me to live out the rest of my life on the farm. At 86 years old, I need the income to replace the 80-year-old roof on the house, improve the septic system, repair the barns, pay for someone to mow my lawns and plow my driveway and be able to afford fuel oil to heat my home so I no longer have to carry wood to the woodstove. As I get older, I know my healthcare costs will rise and I may need home healthcare in the future. The Nexamp Grassy Grove East & West Solar Projects saves the Hayes Farm and also saves me from being forced out of my home.

Therefore, I am hopeful that the Town of Canton Planning Board will approve a Special Use Permit for a Community Solar Lease for both the Grassy Grove East and West Projects that will provide me with sufficient annual income to pay the taxes, maintain the property and cover my living expenses.

Community Benefits:

Solar Projects are new to St. Lawrence County and anytime something new is proposed there is always a fear of how that will change things in the community.

Maybe the change should not be feared but embraced as it may bring many benefits that community members have not yet realized, such as:

- A. Savings on Electric Bills. Community Solar allows residents in the Community to subscribe for clean, green energy and save 10% on their current electric bill.
- B. Tax Revenue: The tax revenue to the Town, County and School District on this parcel of land will increase exponentially. With this new source of revenue, the tax liability of other residents in the Town, County and School District will be lowered. The current County, Town and School Tax revenue on this property is approximately \$6,000. The Town of Canton's SOLAR Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) will generate significantly more tax revenue and offset taxes for the residents.
- C. Community Solar located on the Hayes Farm will act as an environmental buffer to the residential and commercial properties in the area. The practices of Commercial Farmers in the region cause environmental issues that all property owners are concerned about. The Village of Canton Planners may have understood this concept when they decided to site the Village Solar Array on the west side of the village. The Hayes Farm's proposal to move away from Agriculture to clean green solar energy production will allow the following environmental benefits to be realized:
 - a. Air Quality improvements: Liquid Manure and Chicken Manure have been spread on the Hayes Farm over recent years. The smell was so bad at times that sports practices had to be canceled at the adjacent ball field because young players were getting sick, the windows at Canton Central School had to be closed, and I am sure the Nursing Home was very upset and concerned about their elderly patient's health.
 - b. Water Quality Improvements – Agriculture does affect water quality because of the soil erosion, liquid manure, herbicides and pesticides that are sprayed on the crops. John's early death, at the age of 72, was most likely associated with the harmful chemicals that he was exposed to over his life as a farmer.
 - c. Traffic improvements: Large Tractors, 40-ton Manure Tankers and Crop Trucks create a significant danger on Route 310. Especially in front of the Hayes Farm with the 55 mile per hour, curving Rt. 310 highway and intersection with State Street. The solar project would have less traffic than a single-family residence after it is built and operating. Also, with this significantly reduced traffic, especially by removing heavy vehicles with aggressive tires, the road repair and maintenance will be reduced.

- D. The benefits of a diverse economy for the region also need to be recognized. When Nexamp asked the St. Lawrence County Planning Board why they were so focused on this singular issue of Prime Soils, their answer was because Agriculture is the number one industry in the County. If there was a more diverse economy in St. Lawrence County then the economic opportunity would improve to provide more diverse careers that have significantly better incomes levels than what is realized in agriculture. NYSEDA and NYS Economic Development Planners understand this and are developing programs for all New Yorkers to start realizing the benefits of multiple careers in clean energy. See link below:
<https://www.nyserda.ny.gov/Featured-Stories/Discover-Clean-Energy-Careers-With-Roadtrip-Nation>

Engineers, Utility Interconnect Specialist, Electricians, Construction, Technicians and Maintenance Contractors are just a few careers that can be realized and offered to the youth of St. Lawrence County. Keeping that workforce in the North County and contributing to a diverse economy for the region.

- E. Climate Change is here and there is no denying the impact that it is having on our Nation and the World. Even the North Country has been impacted with air quality from the Canadian wildfires, flooding and more severe storms. Gov. Hochul's email on September 19, 2023, may have summed it up best when she said, ***"These events are glaring reminders that while we are the first generation that has felt the impact of climate change, we are the last generation to be able to do anything about it."***

The Hayes Farm would like to join the efforts to mitigate climate change and protect our future generations. We would like to be part of the solution to provide clean green energy to the Community of Canton. As we appreciate Nexamp's significant investment in the screening of the Solar Projects, we also hope that the students on the adjacent hillside will actually see what is being done to protect the environment, create a diverse economy and careers that they will soon participate in.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide you with our comments about why Nexamp's proposed Grassy Grove East & West Solar Projects are so important to proceed with. It saves the Hayes Farm and provides adequate income to allow me to continue to live on the farm. The other Environmental and Economic benefits not only will be enjoyed by me personally but also by the residents of the Town of Canton.

Sincerely,

Erma R. Hayes
Owner of the Hayes Farm
268 Rt. 310
Canton NY 13617

William G. Hayes
Son of Erma Hayes
1433 Heifer Road
Skaneateles, NY 13152