

The regular meeting of the Town Board of the Town of Homer held on Wednesday, May 8, 2019, in the Town Hall Senior Center was called to order by Supervisor Frederick J. Forbes, Sr., at 6:30 p.m.

PRESENT

Frederick J. Forbes, Sr., Supervisor
Michael R. Park, Councilman
Larry R. Jones, Councilman
Barry E. Warren, Councilman
Kevin M. Williams, Councilman
Patrick M. Snyder, Attorney for the Town
John R. Phelps, Highway Superintendent
Anita W. Jebbett, Town Clerk

OTHERS PRESENT

Michael Falls, Assistant Superintendent for Management, Homer Central School District
Bernice Zolla, Computer Technician, Homer Central School District
Jack Honor, Development Manager, EDF Renewables
Victor Siegle, resident
Patrick Clune, Village of Homer Trustee
Linda Jones, Cortland County Legislator
Shenandoah Briere, reporter, Cortland Standard
Don Ferris, reporter, The Homer News

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

MINUTES

The minutes of the April 3rd regular meeting were approved as presented, on motion by Councilman Park, seconded by Councilman Jones and carried unanimously.

MONTHLY REPORTS

Presented for audit by the Board were:

1. The Town Clerk's monthly report of all receipts & disbursements for April.
2. The Code Enforcement Officer's report of building permits issued in April.
3. The Dog Control Officer's report of all activities for the month of March & April.
4. The Supervisor's report of all receipts & disbursements for April.

BILLS TO BE PAID

General bills were approved as audited on motion by Councilman Williams, seconded by Councilman Jones and carried unanimously: **RESOLVED: that General Fund vouchers #90 through #112 totaling \$65,104.26 are approved for payment.**

Highway bills were approved as audited on motion by Councilman Warren, seconded by Councilman Park and carried unanimously: **RESOLVED: that Highway Fund vouchers #67 through #95 totaling \$103,369.87 are approved for payment.**

Trust & Agency bill was approved as audited on motion by Councilman Williams, seconded by Councilman Jones and carried unanimously: **RESOLVED: that Trust & Agency voucher #16 for \$190.00 for Arnold's Florist to fill Town Hall flower urns, using funds left to the Town by the former Little York Garden Club, is approved for payment.**

HOMER CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT BUDGET

Michael Falls attended the meeting on behalf of School Superintendent Tom Turck who was unable to attend for family reasons. He gave a power point presentation on the 2019-2020 Homer Central School District budget, explaining the proposed 1.9% tax increase.

Supervisor Forbes pointed out that instead of being part of the Town's and the Village's tax levy, Phillips Free Library funding will appear on the school district ballot as an addition to the school district tax levy. Falls said that besides placing the Library on its ballot, the school district has no jurisdiction over the Library or its budget.

The Town Board members thanked Mr. Falls for his presentation.

PROPOSAL FOR COMMERCIAL SOLAR FARM

Jack Honor, Development Manager – Grid Scale Power NY for EDF Renewables, introduced himself and his company to the Town Board. They are interested in developing a 300-400 acre commercial solar farm on the east side of the Town adjacent to the high voltage lines that run parallel to East River Road. Honor said that it is their policy to speak with the local governments first before speaking with landowners and promised transparency throughout the entire process. He said that the company tries to avoid wetlands, streams, prime farmland, and areas with endangered species. The permitting process under NY Public Service Commission Article 10 would take about three years, and they would hold a minimum of four public hearings. As part of the process, there would be funds available for the Town to hire its own environmental experts and/or engineers.

In response to questions, Honor said that about 150 jobs would be created during the construction phase, and 3 to 4 permanent jobs. There would be a 7-foot high fence around the perimeter. There was much discussion about a PILOT plan and lease prices. EDF plans to own, operate and maintain the solar farm itself and would be negotiating 40-year leases with landowners. Any decommissioning of the project would have to be in compliance with State regulations which include a letter of credit from a bank for the cost of the removal. He said that they monitor the panels and when one stops working it is replaced – approximately 1/10th of the panels each year. He was not aware of any issues with lightning strikes.

Victor Siegle, a Village resident, questioned solar energy overall – its usefulness in this part of the country, its cost effectiveness, how it is subsidized by government, whether it is appropriate for this County – and presented Honor with a list of 42 questions about locating a solar energy farm in Cortland County, which Honor said he would review.

Supervisor Forbes stated that since the State is promoting solar energy, the money for such projects will go somewhere – it may as well be the Town of Homer. He thanked Honor for his presentation and for letting the Town Board be the first to know about this proposal. Honor said that he would contact them again in a couple of weeks.

NEW BUSINESS

Tax collection to date – Clerk Jebbett reported that the tax collection is going well and 92.64% have been collected to date. The last day for the Town to collect taxes is May 31st.

Pine Street Bridge project – Supervisor Forbes reported that the contract with Economy Paving for the repair of the bridge has been signed and they expect the project to be complete by the end of the summer. The permit for work to be done in the river has been submitted to the DEC. Councilman Jones said that he was pleased that a local contractor had gotten the job, as with the Town Hall project.

Workers' Compensation Insurance – Forbes said that he plans to request bids for insurance coverage from two to three companies. Attorney Snyder reminded the Town Board that they will need to make a decision by July 31st, the date by which the County would need official notification if they decide to terminate the current policy.

Memorial Day parade – Supervisor Forbes reminded the Town Board that they have been invited to participate in the Memorial Day parade starting at 8:30 a.m. on Monday, May 27th.

Payroll policy review – Forbes asked Councilmembers Jones & Williams to review the Town’s personnel/payroll policy over the next few months.

Chamber of Commerce event – Supervisor Forbes said that the Village, as a member of the Chamber of Commerce, is planning to host an after-hours social gathering on Wednesday, May 29th, at the Town Hall. He said that the main event will need to be held in the Senior Center, but attendees would be able to tour the renovated space. While Town Board members agreed to split the cost of the refreshments with the Village, they suggested that the Village take the lead in planning this event. Forbes will work out the details with the Mayor.

Postage meter refill – On motion by Councilman Williams, seconded by Councilman Warren and carried unanimously, **the Town Clerk was authorized to add \$1,500 to the Town’s postage meter.**

TOWN HALL RENOVATION PROJECT

Supervisor Forbes updated the Town Board on the status of the office renovation project. The heating units that have been on back order should be delivered by the end of the week. There was discussion of the layout of both the Town Clerk’s office and the board room.

Forbes said that a change order may be needed to have K & B Plumbing re-locate the air conditioning ducts in the balcony area. The room planned as the Village record storage room will also be used by the Assessor’s office. Forbes suggested that the balcony could provide additional storage for the Village.

Forbes said that in order to renovate the two front offices the front entrance will be closed temporarily. Work will begin as soon as the Village is able to move into their new space.

There was much discussion about the type of signage to have for the new offices. Village Trustee Clune liked the idea of adding a sign out in front listing the offices located in the building.

Councilman Warren is to look into issues with the fire doors on the back entrance due to the lack of heat in the stairwell and on the second level.

COUNTY LEGISLATOR

County Legislator Linda Jones reviewed the activities at the County Legislature over the past month. Andrea Herzog was hired as the new Budget & Finance Director, and the main 911 call center will be moving to a Court Street location owned by the County following renovations there.

Dwyer Park has been undergoing some renovations – Homer Iron Works will be repairing the picnic fireplaces which date back to 1951, and the Town & Country Garden Club will be re-planting the herb garden, formerly maintained by the Little York Garden Club which has since dis-banded.

HIGHWAY SUPERINTENDENT

Highway Superintendent Phelps updated the Board on his department’s activities over the past month. He reported that they have gotten an early start on their CHIPS projects this year with the re-surfacing of Grange Road. All of the sand for the next winter season has been brought in and the salt has been ordered. The new truck is on order and will most likely not be ready until September. Phelps agreed to postpone the sidewalk repairs in front of the Town Hall until after the office renovation project is complete. Phelps will be attending the annual Cornell Highway School in Ithaca in June.

ATTORNEY FOR THE TOWN

Attorney Snyder said that the meeting held by the Cortland County IDA (Industrial Development Agency) a couple of weeks ago about commercial solar farm PILOT(Payment in Lieu of Taxes) agreements was very timely, considering the EDF Renewables presentation earlier in the meeting. Several Towns were represented at the meeting along with Assessors Brian Fitts and David Briggs. The IDA is interested in running any PILOT programs instead of having the County Attorney’s Office involved. They pledged that they would try to be transparent and have open communication with any municipalities involved. An attorney working for them, John Sidd, has expertise in setting up PILOT agreements.

Snyder explained that large commercial solar projects are granted a 15-year property tax exemption under New York State Law that a municipality may either opt out of and levy property taxes, or receive payment for through a PILOT agreement. If the Town does nothing, the solar project receives the tax exemption. If a Town opts out with no PILOT agreement, and levies taxes at full value, it may be likely that the solar project will not be completed. The IDA's position is to have the Town opt out in order that they can preempt and set up a PILOT agreement, thereby giving some consistency to the way such projects are handled in Cortland County.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

Anita W. Jebbett
Town Clerk