

The regular meeting of the Town Board of the Town of Homer held on Wednesday, October 7, 2020, in the Town Hall Senior Center was called to order by Supervisor Frederick J. Forbes, Sr., at 6:30 p.m. Social distancing was observed due to the on-going COVID-19 pandemic.

PRESENT

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

OTHERS PRESENT

Victor Siegle, Homer Village resident
Shenandoah Briere, reporter, Cortland Standard
Donald Ferris, reporter, The Homer News

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

MINUTES

The minutes of the September 2nd regular meeting were approved as presented, on motion by Councilmember Park, seconded by Councilmember Jones and carried unanimously.

MONTHLY REPORTS

Presented for audit by the Board were:

1. The Town Clerk's report of all receipts and disbursements for September.
2. The Code Enforcement Officer's report of all building permits issued for September.
3. The Supervisor's report of all receipts and disbursements for August & September.
4. The Dog Control Officer report of all activities for August & September.

BILLS TO BE PAID

General bills were approved as audited on motion by Councilmember Warren, seconded by Councilmember Jones and carried unanimously: **RESOLVED: that General Fund vouchers #171 through #188 totaling \$32,349.26 are approved for payment.**

Highway bills were approved as audited on motion by Councilmember Jones, seconded by Councilmember Park and carried unanimously: **RESOLVED: that Highway Fund vouchers #137 through #152 totaling \$38,616.00 are approved for payment.**

SOLAR ENERGY FACILITIES PROJECT (EDF)

Resident Victor Siegle thanked the Town Board for the resolution passed at the September meeting establishing a minimum acceptable Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) plan for any solar projects assisted by the Cortland County Industrial Development Agency (IDA). He suggested that the Town add a term of 15 years to the resolution regarding the PILOT plan which is the same term as appears in the Cortland County law regarding solar projects.

Attorney Pat Snyder agreed with adding a 15-year limit to the PILOT plan, and also suggested clarifying the term “communities” in the “Community Host Agreement” (CHA). Supervisor Forbes suggested tying any increase in the PILOT agreement to the annual Cost-Of-Living Adjustment (COLA) rather than a strict 2% increase as stated in the contract and that the County make a similar change.

Siegle passed out a summary and a chart resulting from his many hours of research into the issue of the taxation, or lack thereof, of major solar energy projects in Cortland County, and discussed the ways in which the solar energy developers are taking advantage of Cortland County to “harvest subsidies and tax credits”. (Copies of Siegle’s hand-outs are attached.) In response to a question regarding community solar projects, he explained that the reason they are able to offer discounted electricity rates is that the cost is shifted to other rate payers. Siegel thanked the Town Board for their time and consideration of his concerns and stated that he is available to discuss the issue in further detail anytime.

Supervisor Forbes said that any changes that are made to the September 2nd resolution would also need to be approved by the Town of Cortlandville to make it consistent.

On motion by Councilmember Warren, seconded by Councilmember Park and carried unanimously:
RESOLVED: that the resolution regarding the Cortland County IDA PILOT agreement for solar photovoltaic projects, adopted on September 2nd, 2020, be revised to state that the term be 15 years or less, and that it include the requirement for a cost of living increase or to the increase specified in the County law and that such revised resolution be provided to the County IDA.

TENTATIVE BUDGET FOR 2021

As Budget Officer, Supervisor Forbes summarized the proposed budget for 2021, which includes an increase for most employees of 1.5%, and no change in the Village tax rate of \$1.31/thousand. The Town tax rate of \$2.11 reflects an increase in the Fire District tax rate from .63/thousand to .80/thousand in order to be in compliance with the agreement with the Village for fire protection coverage.

Forbes noted some adjustments that he had made after finding out what the cost of retirement will be in 2021. He also said that the Town may be making some changes to the phones and internet that may result in savings. Dog control will be moved back into the General Fund-Townwide (A). Forbes said he had reduced the annual State Aid and the CHIPS funding by 20% as he expects the State to continue to cut back such aid next year.

Due to some anticipated personnel changes in 2021, Supervisor Forbes proposed that the Town Board have a budget session for discussion only. A meeting was scheduled for 6:30 p.m. on Wednesday, October 14th.

On motion by Supervisor Forbes, seconded by Councilmember Park and carried unanimously:
RESOLVED: that the tentative budget as adjusted is adopted as the preliminary Town budget for 2021, with a proposed tax rate of \$1.31 per thousand for Village residents, and \$2.11 per thousand for Town residents, and with a public hearing on the preliminary budget to be scheduled for 6:30 p.m. on Wednesday, November 4th.

NEW BUSINESS

Dry Hydrant installation – Village Fire Chief Mahlon Irish was unable to attend but had expressed his appreciation of the work of the Town Highway Department to install a dry hydrant on East River Crossing.

Hazard Mitigation Plan - The County is requiring all municipalities to update their hazard mitigation plans in the event of a natural disaster. Supervisor Forbes said that he has discussed the plan with Code Officer John Daniels and Highway Superintendent John Phelps and that they have decided on a proposal to purchase two generators to provide power in the event of an emergency – one for the Town Hall and one for the Highway Garage. Phelps agreed that a generator is an excellent idea and that he is also considering adding a culvert pipe to the plan.

On motion by Supervisor Forbes, seconded by Councilmember Park and carried unanimously:
RESOLVED: that the Town Board approves of the plan put forward by the Town Supervisor to add two generators and a culvert pipe to the Town's hazard mitigation plan, to be purchased as funds become available, and that the plan be filed with TetraTech, a company working on behalf of the County.

Camera proposal – Supervisor Forbes reviewed a proposal by Beard Electric for security cameras for both the Town and the Village which was compiled in conjunction with Village Police Chief Bob Pitman. There was discussion about the proposal and the Town's procurement policy.

Forbes asked Councilmember Williams to review the proposal and bring his recommendations to the next Town Board meeting. Williams agreed to do so and suggested that the Justice Court may be able to obtain a grant to fund any cameras that are installed in or near the Court room. He also said that the Town Board would need to determine how much surveillance is necessary and who would have access and control of any cameras.

Cub Scout pack request – On motion by Councilmember Williams, seconded by Councilmember Warren and carried unanimously: **RESOLVED: that Cub Scout Pack #1, led by Molly Ferris, be allowed to use the Town Hall Senior Center for their occasional evening meetings as long as COVID-19 protocol is followed, with the stipulation that the Town has priority for use of the room.**

Williams and Warren noted that they are in favor of helping out local kids in any way possible.

Bridge Committee – The Board discussed getting members of the Bridge Committee back together to discuss the future of the Wall Street Bridge, after Highway Superintendent Phelps and Supervisor Forbes were contacted by a Town resident who works for C&S Engineers in Syracuse. Forbes said that he would arrange a meeting in the near future to discuss the possibility of a new application to the BridgeNY grant program.

Payroll/Accounting proposal – Supervisor Forbes said that he is planning to out-source the Town's payroll and accounting next year and has received a proposal from local accounting firm, Cahill & Knobel. He had checked with the State Comptroller's Office and they have no issues with the proposal. He also has a verbal agreement with the First National Bank of Dryden to use bill-pay to pay the Town's bills. Councilmember Williams had concerns about control of the payroll and accounting data.

On motion by Councilmember Park, seconded by Councilmember Williams and carried unanimously:
RESOLVED: that subject to the approval of separate contracts, the Town move ahead with turning over the Town's payroll and accounting to Cahill & Knobel and the payment of invoices to the First National Bank of Dryden as of January 1st, 2021.

Assessor agreement – Supervisor Forbes said that they are still working on finalizing the revised agreement with the City of Cortland and the Town of Virgil for the assessment services provided by Brian Fitts and his office staff. All involved have been satisfied with the arrangement.

On motion by Supervisor Forbes, seconded by Councilmember Jones and carried unanimously:
RESOLVED: that the revised contract with Assessor Brian Fitts to provide assessment services for the City of Cortland, Town of Virgil and Town of Homer, following review by the Town Attorney, is approved.

Municipal Cooperative Agreement – The Town Board reviewed the copies of the amended 2020 and 2021 Municipal Cooperative Agreements (MCAs) regarding the Town’s membership in the Greater Tompkins County Municipal Health Insurance Consortium. Councilmember Williams explained that they are following NYS guidelines regarding the addition of new members to the consortium. He said that the Town should expect an increase in the cost of the health insurance of 4.6% for 2021. However, due to savings during the COVID-19 lockdown, insurance premiums for the month of December will be waived.

On motion by Councilmember Williams, seconded by Councilmember Park and carried unanimously:
RESOLVED: that the Town of Homer approves and authorizes the Town Supervisor to sign the 2020 and 2021 Amendments to the Municipal Cooperative Agreement of the Greater Tompkins County Municipal Health Insurance Consortium.

Annual Sexual Harassment Training – Supervisor Forbes will contact PERMA regarding the annual training which this year may be done online.

HIGHWAY SUPERINTENDENT

Highway Superintendent Phelps updated the Town Board on his department’s activities over the past month. He said that all salt ordered for the winter season is now stockpiled, and most of his summer roadwork complete. He still intends to complete some shoulder work which will be eligible for coverage by the CHIPS highway grant program. In between seasons some members of his crew plan to use their vacation time. Phelps said that he has plans in 2021 to do some roadwork on the east side of the Town.

ATTORNEY FOR THE TOWN

Attorney Pat Snyder stated that work on the Speedway assessment lawsuit continues with nothing new to report at this time. The Cipriani Energy Group has proposed a solar energy project for property at the intersection of Wolf and Sweeney Roads which is currently zoned residential. He has notified them that they would need to apply for a use variance but to date they have not done so. On the large solar project proposed by EDF the State has approved and signed the consultant contract with Barton & Loguidice Engineers and himself. In response to a complaint he had received about speeding on Cosmos Hill Road, Snyder asked Highway Superintendent Phelps to check to make certain that the 40 mph speed limit signs are still standing and are visible.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:25 p.m.

Anita W. Jebbett
Town Clerk