

Wheatfield adopts solar law changes; pledges support for Hunt Street bridge reopening

BY MICHAEL DEPIETRO

On Monday, the Town of Wheatfield voted to adopt a number of revisions to its solar law, largely pertaining to utility-scale solar farms and energy systems. The amendments are aimed at addressing public concerns surrounding such facilities that were raised after a 6.3-megawatt project by Borrego Solar Systems at 2469 Lockport Road was approved and completed following the initial solar law's passing in 2017. The move comes as a town-imposed six month moratorium on new solar projects expired this month.

The moratorium allowed ample time for the law to be reviewed by an appointed Solar Committee. Wendel, the Town's engineering firm, acted as a consultant during the review. The review determined the previous law was "outdated and did not address the issues in the Wheatfield Comprehensive Plan."

During a July public hearing on the changes, Walt Garrow, chairman of the Wheatfield Planning Board, and vice chairman of the Niagara County Planning Board, called the new law "comprehensively better." He also said it had "more teeth" to it in terms of code enforcement as stipulations will be outlined within special use permits, which are subject to yearly review. Upon complaints, facility owners will be given a set amount of time to rectify issues and noncompliance can result in the termination of the permit and the site shut down.

Other clarifications include what zoning districts solar systems are allowed in, setback requirements, screening and landscaping, post construction and decommissioning among others.

Hunt Street Bridge

Three years after Niagara County closed the Hunt Street Bridge - which had been actively used in Bergholz for over 100 years - the Town Board is calling for its reopening. Town officials and residents speaking about the closure noted the closure creates a dead-end street situation making school bus usage impossible, and hinders the Highway Department's snow removal, leaf pickup and tree limb/brush chipping, as town vehicles cannot back up safely.

Far worse, the closure causes delays for first responders, a tragic fact that resident Ruth Voelker experienced firsthand. In heart-wrenching detail, she described the night of her husband's heart attack, watching emergency vehicles realize they couldn't access the bridge and driving away toward the detour route. In those ensuing extra minutes, her husband passed away.

As such, the board issued a proclamation to be sent to the county legislature in support of the bridge's restoration. Councilman Larry Helwig went on to read a letter from Legislature Chairwoman Rebecca Wydysch, who said there will be an upcoming meeting discussing plans for replacement.

"I'm sorry that I cannot be there with you this evening to show my support of the Hunt Street bridge replacement. Please know that I have made significant progress in the past few weeks obtaining support for this project from my colleagues. I have scheduled a meeting for residents at the Wheatfield Community Center on Monday, Sept. 20, at 6 p.m., to discuss the county's plan, and path to moving forward," Wydysch wrote.

Flooding

Monday's meeting was the first Town Board meeting since July, which saw historic back-to-back rain events that caused flooding all over Western New York. A group of residents from the Eaglechase subdivision located off Lockport Road spoke during the meeting and said their area was impacted by these supposed once-in-a-lifetime rain events.

Mary Poole said that, eight years after flooding caused close to \$30,000 in damages to her home, last month's flooding brought in close to 40 inches of water in her basement and caused \$9,000 in damages, not including personal losses or damages. She said her current sump pump, which had been purchased along with a backup generator after the last major event, simply couldn't keep up with the rising waters.

But it's not just during storms. Poole and other residents said the street is constantly flooding even in modest weather, and area basements are affected almost yearly.

"When you spend \$250,000 on a home, and you have \$30,000 in insurance claims in 10 years, something's wrong," Poole said.

Superintendent Don MacSwan said the town is aware of the area's history and would be meeting with its engineers and Highway Department to look at possible solutions in the coming weeks.

However, he and Highway Superintendent Paul Siegmann acknowledged drainage issues due to debris are a problem through-

out the town. Siegmann said one of the department's biggest issues right now is a manpower shortage; it simply cannot inspect or service all of its drains and ditches.

"We do have a drainage crew. They are not operating every day, I will tell you that right now, because there are days when I have 10 guys on a drainage crew and there are days when I need that drainage crew on a road job. And that's just the way it works," Siegmann said.

He also noted the town lacks permanent drainage easements meaning, in order for crews to do inspections and cleanings, signatures from the property owners are required and it can be a struggle to get them.

In the interim, town officials said that, unfortunately, residents have to be diligent about keeping their homes protected with sump pumps and backup generators. If they notice debris obstructing drainage ways, they should not only contact the town but, in many cases, it might be more prudent to clear them themselves.

"Everybody being diligent and observant of their immediate surroundings is key in this," Wendel engineer Tim Zuber said. "If your drainage outlet in front your house is completely covered and clogged with leaves and grass ... you can take that action on your own; protect yourself. It's just being diligent."

Elsewhere, the board approved:

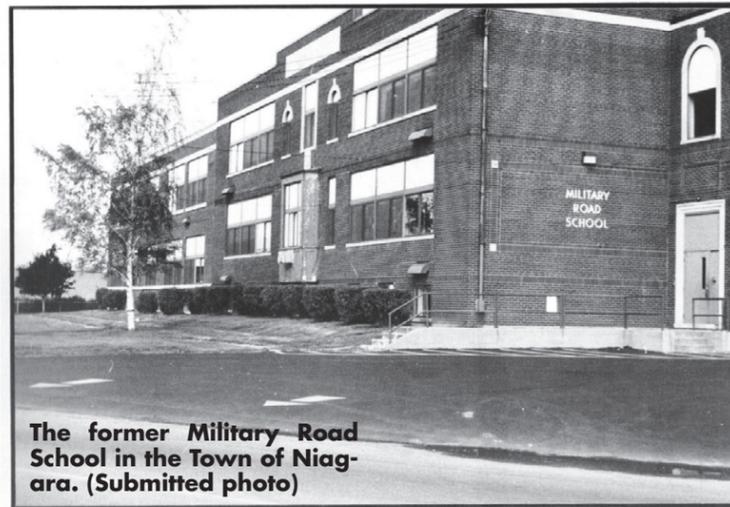
- ✓ An amendment to the 2021 special grant fund budget to appropriate a portion of the American Rescue Plan Act Grant to be used for paving/resurfacing Brookhaven Drive and Duero Drive at the estimated cost of \$25,000.

- ✓ An amendment to the 2021 highway fund budget to provide the estimated revenue and budget appropriation for the increase in the New York State CHIPS Grant to be used for additional highway street repairs totalling \$24,037.08.

- ✓ Resolution to raise Water Department meter fees due to price increases from suppliers as follows: 5/8-inch meter fee from \$230 to \$286; 1-inch meter fee from \$350 to \$420; 1½-inch meter fee from \$660 to \$774; 2-inch meter fee from \$860 to \$1027; 1-inch meter base when frozen - \$180; 1½-inch meter base when frozen - \$440; and 2-inch meter base when frozen - \$654.

TON Historical Society to hold 'history hunt' program

Groups seeks photo information on former Military Road School



The former Military Road School in the Town of Niagara. (Submitted photo)

Town of Niagara Historian Peter Aimes, the TON Historical Society and committee members are currently seeking the assistance of residents and others who attended the former Military Road School for an information collection effort on the school's history.

"We hope that the public will help us identify the names of students who attended Military Road School," Aimes said.

He explained the group would sponsor a special information-sharing event open to the general public from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 5, at the Calvin K. Richards Community Center at Veterans Park on Lockport Road.

Historical Society members have compiled roughly 50 years of school group pictures between themselves, but many photos don't list the names of the students.

"We would greatly appreciate the help of former teachers, students, parents, etc., to come that day and fill in some of those blanks for the future," Aimes said.

The program will also include a brief ceremony at noon when the

Rolling and Marsh families will unveil signage for the Local History Room in the Calvin K. Richards Community Center.

"Due to their devotion in preserving the history of the Town of Niagara, the conference room at the Calvin Richards Community Center in Veterans Park will be named after Dorothy Rolling and her mother, Mary Mars. Between mother and daughter, they served for almost half a century as Town of Niagara historians.

"The Marsh/Rolling Local History Room will be a repository for our past, present and future, and Dorothy and Mary deserve the attention it will bring to them and their families," Aimes said. "So, please join us on Sunday ... to help identify the school student pictures and to dedicate the Marsh/Rolling Local History Room."

The Marsh/Rolling Local History Room will be available by appointment to help with any history questions regarding Town of Niagara people, businesses and organizations. For more information, contact Aimes at 297-4429.

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WED 6AM-8PM - Chicken Pot Pie, Hot Turkey Sandwich or Fish
THURS 6AM-8PM - Chicken Piccata or Fish - Battered, Breaded, Baked
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