

Minutes
Planning & Economic Development Committee
May 20, 2026, 6:00 pm, Legislative Chambers
Livestreamed on YouTube
Gerace Office Building, Mayville, NY

Members Present: Harmon, Penhollow, Johnson, Merritt, DeJoy

Others: Chagnon, Lee, Karen Engstrom, Sharp, Aldrich

Complete video of meeting can be viewed on YouTube

Chairman Harmon called the meeting to order at (6:00 p.m.)

Approval of Minutes (04/15/26)

MOVED by Legislator Johnson, SECONDED by Legislator Penhollow to approve the minutes

Unanimously Carried

Privilege of the Floor

Chairman Harmon: Next item is privilege of the floor. Do we have anybody here to speak on the privilege of the floor? I already got mine, thank you, Karen. Great, and if you could introduce yourself, I'd appreciate it.

Karen Engstrom: Karen Engstrom for Chautauqua Energy Watch. We're here because we're concerned about the wind laws that are being passed throughout the county. We know the towns that are targeted with 600-foot wind turbines include Stockton, Ellery, North Harmony, Sherman, Westfield, Ripley. There are also lease attempts being made in Clymer, Mina, and the Town of Chautauqua. What is key here is the setbacks. The setbacks from property lines will protect the individuals who will live near wind turbines should they pass, should they become part of our life here in Chautauqua County. Many towns throughout the state have successfully used adequate turbine setbacks to discourage irresponsible and aggressive wind developers. Protective setbacks are recommended by health experts and I provide several of those experts, will do so in email, as a video form that came to us through a hearing by Senator Ortt at the state level. Those experts recommend a four-mile setback for wind turbines. Our county health department has recommended a 1.5-mile setback from property lines to protect people and animals from the adverse health effects of industrial wind turbines. The new information is that towns in our region are considering minimal model laws, wind laws that benefit the developer. However, there are many towns who have succeeded. One is Pomfret. Pomfret requires a six-times the height of turbine setbacks. The NY town of Parishville requires a five-times the height of turbine setbacks. The town of Richland has setbacks of 5,280 feet. Cortland has setbacks of 3,280 feet. Cape Vincent setbacks of 3,000 feet. Hammond and Hopkin setbacks of 2500 feet. None of these towns have wind turbine projects and none has been challenged. The accounts below give you a history of how

places like Cortland saw the approach of Avant Guard or one of the wind turbine companies and leases were secured for those lands and then those towns, that particular town as the others cited here, revised their zoning laws to indicate a setback of 2,500 feet. They were successful in watching a withdrawal of that wind project. The sources of criticism of proximity of wind turbines come from the World Health Organization, the Canadian Physicians Association. Some of you have that attached. I will send it in email. And Steuben County residents who are too close to barren wind turbines and they are filing occurrences of the symptoms that our people are also suffering, which is dizziness, sleeplessness, nausea, vomiting, syncope, which is being unresponsive or loss of consciousness due to the low frequency vibrations caused. Now, not all people respond this way to wind turbines but a sufficient number do. If our towns do not know that they can have the opportunity to put in protective wind laws, then we will see 600-foot wind turbines throughout our county. The county itself can perhaps find some initiative, some policy to protect our quality of life. I would say that PFAS/PFOS, which is a very dangerous component in most wind turbines, solar panels, and battery energy storage systems is a threat to our drinking water sources and should be required as not allowed in any of the components. Hopefully you can share this information with others, the towns that are concerned or take action to protect us because it's imminent if we don't.

Legislator Penhollow: Mr. Chairman?

Karen Engstrom: Go ahead.

Legislator Penhollow: So, Karen, I do agree with you wholeheartedly on these concerns and it also applies to solar. It also applies to the data centers as well. And just from what has been happening in the town of Portland, or what hasn't happened, and I don't think it's going to happen because it's not a permitted use in the Town of Portland regarding a data center and there's zoning laws. So, I did a little more research into that. There's a young woman out of, maybe, Schuyler County, Schuylerville, New York. Her name is Alex Fasulo. Yeah, and so I'm reading more about the Office of Renewable Energy Siting and if anyone—if anyone has not looked into this, I can't verify how accurate, how truthful, how factual it is, but should any of that be factual, we should be scared. We should be nervous and we should do more research and get involved. And so that young woman, that young woman opened my eyes through some of this stuff and I'm just starting. Doesn't matter what party you're at. Doesn't matter. Okay. There's no political party with what this Office of Renewable Energy Siting is doing. The devastation that they're doing, especially in one of the large Adirondack Parks and I'm very concerned that it's going to come through our county, our rural areas. And there was a time that I was for the wind turbines and the solar and the simple fact was it was based on, how could I tell my parents if they own 50 acres that they may or may not have a wind turbine. They lived on, you know, they live on a restricted budget and if somebody's going to pay you 2,500 to \$3,000 a month guaranteed for the next 25 years how could I tell them they can't do that? And so how it's coming around full circle. And so, I would just make one more point. Office of Renewable Energy Siting, ORES-

Karen Engstrom: It's the dictatorial bureaucratic branch that's forcing these projects and there has to be a third way, an opportunity to do a positive alternative so that the economic forces take this out of commission.

Legislator Johnson: So, I mean, you and I have just discussed this. I'm a farmer. I'm- my own, heck, going on 500 acres. I don't want people telling me what I can and can't do on my farm. But there's a limit to that. And the limit is, well, I should be free to do what I want on my own property. I should not be free to do so at the detriment of my neighbors or of the ecology or those two things anyway. That's just kind of a common-law, common-sense rule.

Legislator Penhollow: That's ignorable, though.

Legislator Johnson: I mean, let's say a stream runs through my farm, the water coming off my farm ought to be no dirtier than when it came on, you know? When you—on top of that, it's one thing for me to do what I want on my farm with my own money, but when I'm doing it with taxpayer money and ratepayer money, now the legislature and government and we as protectors of our citizens have a real role. So, I mean, whether it's 5,000 feet and I think it's different site by site, but the basic principle that you may not take taxpayer money, use it to your advantage to enhance your own economic well-being and do so with disregard for your neighbors or the environment is just an unacceptable proposition. Now, Orius is what you're talking about has taken a lot of home rule away on this issue. A lot. But we still, on a county level and at a town level have cards to play and playing those cards legally, intelligently, is important.

Legislator Penhollow: ORES gas jurisdiction from New York State, DC.

Legislator Johnson: No, it, it's part of the Green New Deal in another part of it.

Karen Engstrom: It takes a lot of steps. It takes a lot of steps. If a town has put in substantial setbacks requirements and sound requirements in its zoning laws, it will take the state a great deal of effort to overcome that to force it. So, the towns have to be informed. We have one town already that's put 1500-foot setback into its wind law and that's—that just is a green light to the developer. Unless these towns know that they can protect their residents and our quality of life.

Legislator Johnson: And, so, we're here in Planning and Economic Development, right? So, I'm of the humor that if the IDA ever grants one of these things, another PILOT, my cooperation with the IDA goes to zero.

Karen Engstrom: There's your no-PILOT resolution. Last piece of paper. No PILOT. And it says-

Legislator Johnson: And I mean, why, you know, they say the IDA is independent, but then they come ask for our help all the time. They're not independent. They-they're so-

Karen Engstrom: Right. Well, they get-

Legislator Johnson: I mean, they feed at our trough.

Karen Engstrom: Well, they get—they get 1%-

Legislator Johnson: There you go.

Karen Engstrom: -and if you figure that out-\$10 million project, that's a hundred million—\$100, 000—

Legislator Johnson: It's a cracking conflict—it's a cracking conflict of interest.

Karen Engstrom: Definitely. Here's your—here's your PILOT, no PILOT, “whereas it has been demonstrated that the environmental, economic, and community impacts of large wind energy projects might well have a net negative effect on this county.” And that came from this body. It still exists.

Legislator Johnson: Oh, that's the resolution from 2019?

Karen Engstrom: Yes. 18. You can revise it. Revise it, make it stronger. There's a heck of a lot of other “whereas's” that you can put in there. And—and, the IDA should, I mean, you can—you can argue all you want, but this county legislature does have the right to advise its subordinate, which is supposedly the IDA.

Legislator Johnson: Well, the IDA isn't really our subordinate, is it? I mean, they depend on us for funding. So, in a practical sense, yes.

Karen Engstrom: They are only appointed by the county executive. Did you know that? The head of the IDA is appointed by the county executive. He can withdraw that.

Legislator Johnson: Is that so? Okay, interesting. I didn't know that.

Chairman Harmon: Do you have any other questions? Okay. Questions? Vince, you have Anything to add?

Legislator DeJoy: Nope.

Chairman Harmon: Karen, do you have anything to add?

Karen Engstrom: No questions here. Fred Larson has a lot of information on the IDA.

Legislator Johnson: Oh, dear.

Chairman Harmon: Thank you, Karen. Thanks for your time.

Proposed Resolution – Appointment to the Chautauqua County Agricultural & Farmland Protection Board—*Presented by Lauren Sharp, Senior Planner with the Department of Planning & Development*

Unanimously Carried

Proposed Resolution – Authorizing Extension of Lease Agreement for Department of Planning & Development at the BWB Center in Jamestown—*Presented by Nathan Aldrich, Economic Development Coordinator*

Unanimously Carried

Discussion—~~Southern Tier West: Project Updates, presented by~~
~~Southern Tier West -~~ ***Rescheduled until the June 2026 Planning & Economic Development Committee meeting***

MOVED by Legislator Johnson, SECONDED by Legislator Merritt to adjourn.
Unanimously Carried (6:18 p.m.)

Respectfully submitted and transcribed,
Olivia L. Lee, Clerk of the Legislature/Kristi R. Zink, Deputy Clerk