

Keene Township Planning Commission

Minutes from meeting dated 3-25-2025

Denny Briggs called the meeting to order at 7:00pm with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Roll call:

Present: Denny Briggs, Ray Krieger, Cori Wilber, Matt Stahlin, Nate Wolff

Absent: Nancy Solomon

Note: 1 current vacancy

There were approximately 8 members of the community present along with Zoning Administrator Jeanne Vandersloot.

Changes to the agenda:

Wilber made a motion to accept the agenda. Stahlin seconded. All approved. Motion carried.

Approval of last meeting minutes:

Stahlin made a motion to accept the minutes from the 3-10-2025 meeting. Wolff seconded. All approved. Motion carried.

Report from Township Board Rep:

Per Wolff:

- A motion was made and passed at the last Board meeting to have Foster & Swift law firm draft a resolution to reduce the PC from 7 members to 5. The Board will still need to vote on it.
- Community member Harvey Noon Sr. recently passed away. A memorial will be held in May at Bertha Brock Park.
- April 26th is Township Clean Up Day. Volunteers are needed. Vandersloot will send flyers to properties that she has been receiving complaints on.
- Resident Brad Potter provided an update on possible improvements for the Flat River access point at Whites Bridge.

Report from Zoning Administrator:

Report was given at another PC meeting earlier this month.

Public Comment – Wind Energy Systems Public Hearing:

Dave Pachulski questioned the proposed overlay district, asking why that area was chosen instead of the properties that have already signed leases.

Jeanne Vandersloot stated she doesn't believe there should be any overlay district for wind energy.

Planning Commission Discussion – Wind Energy Systems Public Hearing:

Chairman Briggs asked each member if they'd like to proceed with recommending District 3 to the Board as the overlay district for wind. Wilber and Wolff would like to move forward. Krieger suggested no overlay for wind or at least would like to consider something other than or more than District 3; Stahlin agreed. Briggs did not agree with opening it up to the entire AG district but does not want to move forward with only District 3 as drafted.

Discussion about proposing an overlay district versus a zoning district and the boundaries of each continued for an extended period. Talked about possibly using the AG district.

Dave Pachulski from the audience stated he is on Otisco Township's Planning Commission. They had sent out a renewable energy survey to Otisco residents, found that the majority of the responses were not in favor of renewables, and utilized their township's attorney to assist them with implementing an ordinance that allows no more than 40 acres of renewable energy total in their township.

Wilber made a motion to send the drafted wind energy ordinance to the Board as written. Wolff seconded. Krieger and Stahlin did not approve. Briggs abstained because he didn't agree with District 3 or the entire AG district. Motion did not pass.

Briggs suggested expanding District 3, adding additional verbiage to indicate that the PC would also consider other reasonable areas, or changing the draft to allow applicants to bring the PC a suggested area. Briggs also brought up "demonstrated need" and the concern that if we propose too small of an area, our ordinance could be seen as too restrictive, which could potentially open the township up to a lawsuit. A simple Google search showed that a 20MW wind project could occupy anywhere between 200 and 800 acres.

Wilber reminded the group that anyone wanting to build a Wind Energy System would need to submit an application for a Special Use Permit (SUP), which would be presented to the PC to approve or deny, and that there are documented Basis of Approval guidelines for SUPs.

Resident Polly Wolff posed a question: If a township is notified that a lawsuit is pending against them, are they given an opportunity to change course to avoid the suit? Any negotiation period?

Briggs asked if there would be any support from other PC members to stick with District 3 plus 100 acres anywhere north of Scott Rd.

Wolff made a motion to send the draft to the Board as written (same motion that was made earlier in meeting). Wilber seconded. Krieger, Stahlin, and Briggs did not approve. Motion did not pass.

Wolff made a motion to designate all of Sections 1 and 2 of the township as a wind energy overlay district. Wilber seconded. Stahlin and Krieger did not approve. Briggs abstained. Motion did not pass.

Consideration was given to the fact that the Board was looking to have the renewable energy ordinances wrapped up quickly, and that if an overlay district's boundaries were changed by the PC during public hearing, another public hearing would need to be scheduled, and notices sent out to adjacent property owners again. However, if a change is made to an entire zoning district (such as AG, AR, RR, etc.), a public hearing is not required, and notices do not need to be mailed out.

Stahlin made a motion to remove District 3 from the drafted wind energy ordinance and replace it with the AG district, adding the stipulation that wind energy may not exceed 20 MW in the township. Krieger seconded. Wolff and Wilber did not approve. Briggs approved, clarifying that he is doing so only to move the ordinance to the Board since the PC could not come to a consensus. Motion carried.

New Business:

- None.

Old Business:

- Wilber made a motion to delay working on Battery Storage Systems until the next PC meeting. Stahlin seconded. All approved. Motion carried.

Public Comment – Any Topic:

- None

Adjournment:

- Stahlin made a motion to adjourn. Wilber seconded. All approved. The meeting adjourned at 9:45pm.

Minutes recorded by Cori Wilber.