

Winter 2023

Keene Residents:

Dates to remember:

March Board of Review March 13 and March 17
Regular and Annual Township Board Meeting March 14
Cleanup Day April 29th 7-12

A new committee has been formed to address the parking problem at the Hall. For overflow parking, the residents have to park along the sides of Higgins Rd and cross Potters Rd, often in the dark. The Township owns ½ an acre of property. Between the existing parking, the building, and the well/drain field, all the property is in use, not leaving any room for additional parking. At this time, there is no adjacent property for sale. A few of the suggestions include looking for a new location and selling the building, finding a vacant lot, and moving the existing building, or buying land with a suitable building on it to renovate. If you have a suggestion or a location in mind, please contact the Township at keenetwp@gmail.com or call 616-642-9809 and leave us a message.

The most active matter in the Township is the updating of our commercial solar ordinance. The Planning Commission and Township Board have been working on it since last April. After hearing that a large commercial solar company was leasing property, we felt we needed to educate ourselves and residents, so on June 23rd last year we held an informational meeting at Saranac Community Schools in their auditorium. We invited a bioenergy specialist from MSU Extension named Merrill Gould, a representative from ITC (the company that owns the electrical transmission lines), and a representative from Invenergy (the company leasing land in the Township for a proposed 100 megawatt solar project). This meeting was recorded and is available to view on the Keene Township website keenetownship.org. The recording is located in the public notice and announcement Home page. On July 25th the Planning Commission held a special meeting open to the public to hear concerns and accept useful information from the Township residents. Starting in August, the Planning Commission and the members of the public have been meeting monthly to rework the solar ordinance. At the January 2023 meeting, a draft was then sent to the Township Attorney for

his review. On February 7th the Planning Commission met and discussed his recommendations. The March 7th Planning Commission meeting will likely finish the ordinance and a public hearing meeting will be set.

Township government rules are new to a lot of the residents so I will explain what happens next. If the Planning Commission is finished with the changes to the ordinance, it schedules a public hearing on the draft ordinance. A notice is published and posted with the time and place of the meeting. During the public hearing the Planning Commission will take comments from the public. Once that is done, they may make adjustments and then will vote to recommend to approve or disapprove the ordinance. The recommendation then goes to the Township Board at their next meeting. The Township Board can vote to approve, deny, or send it back to the Planning Commission for more consideration. If the draft ordinance is adopted by majority vote, it will be published by a notice in the newspaper, posted on the Township website, and at the hall. 7 days after publication the ordinance takes effect. During those 7 days a “referendum intent process” can come into play. By following State guidelines, Township residents can ask, by a specific number of signed petitions, for a Township wide vote to approve or disapprove all or part of the changes to the draft ordinance. If the draft ordinance is denied, the ordinance reverts to the original before any changes were proposed. If adopted, it becomes the new ordinance.

Over the past several months, emotions have been running high. Residents are worried about the value of their property, landowners upset that they would be limited to what they can do on their property, and Keene Board members reacting to being recalled. There are no easy answers in this situation. There has also been a lot of misinformation circulating about the solar ordinance. One of the perceptions is that the Township Board has not been listening to concerns, but as Supervisor I have received very few calls or emails regarding it. All the information about the whole solar ordinance, not just the commercial section, is available on the website at keenetownship.org. Please take time to review it and if you have any questions, contact me at the Township via phone 616-642-9809 or email keenetwp@gmail.com.

Robert Simpson, Supervisor